

Patient exemption checking

A guide for ophthalmic contractors in England

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Purpose

This guide for ophthalmic team members sets out how and why it is important to check whether a patient is entitled free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services.

Background

Not all benefits entitle people to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services. The rules around entitlement to free or reduced cost ophthalmic treatment can be difficult for some patients to understand. They may need help to correctly claim help with health costs and to avoid penalty charges.

How to check a patient's exemption status

A patient's exemption status applies and must be valid on the date of the sight test and the date on which the patient orders their spectacles or contact lenses. Any time a patient makes a declaration that they are entitled to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services you must ask them to produce evidence. **This is a legislative requirement under your GOS contract.**

When a patient attends an ophthalmic practice for NHS-funded sight test, glasses or contact lenses:

- ask them to complete and sign a GOS declaration form before any treatment begins
- if the patient is entitled to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services, ask them to complete the patient's details and patient's declaration section of the form
- ask to see evidence of their eligibility
- if they show evidence of a valid exemption, note this on your patient record system along with the expiry date of the evidence, if applicable
- if the patient is entitled, complete and sign the GOS 3 declaration. A second signature on the reverse of the GOS 3 must be obtained at the time of collection

If the patient does not provide evidence

If the patient does not provide evidence of their entitlement to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services:

- **do not refuse treatment**
- put an X in the 'Evidence not seen' box on the GOS form
- ask the patient to sign the declaration on the GOS form

If the patient is unsure of their entitlement

If the patient is unsure whether they are entitled to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services:

- ask them to pay for their ophthalmic treatment
- give them HC5(O) refund form and explain they can claim a refund within three months
- explain that they can find out if they're entitled to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services, prescriptions, dental treatment and help with other NHS costs using the online eligibility checker at: www.nhs.uk/CheckBeforeYouTick

- tell them about exemption certificates; why they are required and how to apply

If a patient later finds out they are entitled to receive free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services, they can claim a refund within three months of the date they paid for their NHS sight test. To claim a refund the patient must submit:

- a completed HC5(O) form
- the receipt for the NHS sight test

For more information about patient refunds and to apply online, visit:

www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-travel-eye-care-wigs-and-fabric-support-costs

It is the patient's responsibility to make sure they have correctly claimed that they are entitled to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services. This is the case regardless of the GOS form is completed by:

- the patient
- someone on the patient's behalf
- the ophthalmic team

For more information, visit: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-penalty-charges

To ensure that patients correctly claim for exemptions you can help them by displaying information including posters, guidance booklets and counter cards. You can download resources from our website: www.nhs.uk/CheckBeforeYouTick

Who is entitled?

NHS sight test

A patient is entitled to free NHS sight tests if they are:

Criteria	Acceptable evidence
Under 16 years of age	N/A
16, 17 or 18 and in full-time education	N/A. However, they must put the name of their college or university on the GOS form.
60 or over	N/A
Registered as partially sighted or blind	N/A
Diagnosed with diabetes or glaucoma	N/A. However, the name of the GP or hospital should be written on the GOS form.
40 or over and their mother, father, sibling, or child has been diagnosed with glaucoma	N/A
Advised by an eye doctor (ophthalmologist) that they are at risk of glaucoma	N/A. However, the name of the GP or hospital should be written on the GOS form.
A prisoner on leave from a prison institution	N/A. However, the name of the prison should be written on the GOS form.
Eligible for an NHS complex lens voucher	N/A

If a patient receives one of the following benefits, their partner, and any dependent young people under 20 are also entitled to free sight tests:

Criteria	Acceptable evidence
Income Support (incapacity benefit and Disability Living allowance does not qualify)	A current letter for the relevant criteria which states: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• name of person receiving benefit• date of birth• National Insurance number
Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (contribution based does not qualify)	
Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (contribution-related does not qualify)	
Pension Credit Guarantee Credit (Savings credit only does not qualify)	

Universal Credit and meets the qualifying criteria (visit www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/UC for qualifying criteria)	
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A patient is entitled to free NHS sight tests if named on one of the following certificates:

Criteria	Acceptable evidence
HC2 certificate	A current certificate that states the name of the patient and certificate number
NHS Tax Credit exemption certificate and meets the qualifying criteria. (Tax credits don't automatically entitle people to free or reduced cost NHS sight tests. To check the qualifying criteria, visit www.nhs.uk/healthcosts).	Exemption certificate that states the name of patient, or award notice (letter)

A patient is entitled to reduced cost NHS sight tests if they are named on the following certificate:

Criteria	Acceptable evidence
HC3 certificate	Certificate must be current and display: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • patient's name • certificate number • maximum amount patient is required to pay for an NHS course of ophthalmic treatment

NHS optical vouchers

A patient is entitled to NHS optical vouchers if the individual is:

Criteria	Acceptable evidence
Under 16 years of age	N/A
16, 17 or 18 and in full-time education	N/A. However, they must put the name of their college or university on the GOS form
Registered as partially sighted or blind	N/A
A prisoner on leave from a prison institution	N/A. However, the name of the prison should be written on the GOS form.

Eligible for an NHS complex lens voucher	N/A
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Criteria	Acceptable evidence
Income Support (incapacity benefit and Disability Living allowance does not qualify)	A current letter for the relevant criteria which states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name of person receiving benefit • date of birth • National Insurance number
Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (contribution based does not qualify)	
Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (contribution-related does not qualify)	
Pension Credit Guarantee Credit (Savings credit only does not qualify)	
Universal Credit and meets the qualifying criteria (visit www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/UC for qualifying criteria)	

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A patient is entitled to reduced cost NHS optical vouchers if they are named on the following certificate:

Criteria	Acceptable evidence
HC3 certificate	Certificate must be current and display: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• patient's name• certificate number• maximum amount patient is required to pay for NHS ophthalmic services

NHS complex lens vouchers

A patient is entitled to NHS complex lens vouchers if the individual requires lenses either -10/+10 dioptries or more, or prism-controlled bifocal lenses.

Complex lens vouchers are a contribution towards the cost of these lenses – currently £14.60 for single vision lenses and £37.40 for bifocal lenses.

These vouchers are only available to those who meet the clinical criteria and are not eligible for one of the main optical vouchers.

NHS mobile sight test

If a patient is entitled to NHS sight tests, they may also be entitled to a mobile sight test. An optometrist can visit an individual:

- at home – if the patient is unable to leave home unaccompanied because of physical or mental illness or disability
- at a residential or care home – if the resident is unable to leave the home unaccompanied because of physical or mental illness or disability
- at a day centre – if the patient cannot get a sight test at an optician's practice because of physical or mental illness or disability, or has difficulties communicating their health needs unaided.

NHS Low Income Scheme

The NHS Low Income Scheme provides support for patients who need help with paying for sight tests, glasses and contact lenses. A patient can find out if they qualify for the scheme by completing an HC1 form.

However, the patient should continue to pay for any NHS treatment, glasses or contact lenses until any exemptions are confirmed. If a patient later finds out they are entitled to receive free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services, they can claim a refund within three months of the date they paid for their NHS sight test.

For more information about the NHS Low Income Scheme and to apply, visit: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-low-income-scheme.

Help and support

For more information, contact us on 0300 330 1343 or visit www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-travel-eye-care-wigs-and-fabric-support-costs/sight-tests-glasses-and-contact-lenses

Patients can find out if they're entitled to free or reduced cost NHS ophthalmic services and help with other NHS costs using the online eligibility checker: www.nhs.uk/CheckBeforeYouTick