Community pharmacies do much more than dispense prescriptions. In England, the NHS Pharmacy First service lets people seek advice and, where appropriate, treatment for seven common conditions without first booking a GP appointment. That can mean quicker access for a straightforward problem, while helping GP practices focus on patients who need their care.

But Pharmacy First is not a walk-in service for every illness, and a pharmacist may decide that another type of care is safer. The conditions covered, age limits and treatment options are specific. This guide explains the current **pharmacy first conditions**, how the service works and where vaccinations and travel health fit in.

What is NHS Pharmacy First?

NHS Pharmacy First is an NHS service in England. A participating community pharmacist can assess certain common conditions, offer advice and, if appropriate, provide treatment under an NHS-approved protocol. Depending on the assessment, this may include a prescription-only medicine supplied under a patient group direction (PGD), without the patient needing a separate GP prescription.

The pharmacist will ask questions about symptoms, health conditions and medicines, and may examine the affected area where suitable. They can recommend self-care, supply treatment if the person meets the criteria, or refer them to a GP, NHS 111 or urgent care. Being assessed does not guarantee that a medicine will be supplied.

The service is designed to make care more accessible, not to replace GPs or emergency services. It is available through participating pharmacies in England; arrangements differ elsewhere in the UK. NHS England publishes service information, while the **NHS Pharmacy First** pages on the NHS website explain what patients can expect. Check current guidance before relying on age limits or pathway details, as service arrangements can change.

The NHS Pharmacy First list: seven conditions

The current NHS Pharmacy First list covers these seven pathways. Each has its own eligibility criteria, including age limits and symptom requirements.



Condition Who may be assessed? What the pharmacist can do Sinusitis People aged 12 and over Assess symptoms, recommend self-care and decide whether further treatment or referral is appropriate. Sore throat People aged 5 and over Assess the throat and symptoms, advise on relief and consider treatment or referral under the pathway. Earache (acute otitis media) Children and young people aged 1 to 17 Assess for middle-ear infection and advise on treatment or onward care. Infected insect bites People aged 1 and over Assess whether a bite appears infected and recommend suitable treatment or referral. Impetigo People aged 1 and over Assess the skin infection and determine whether treatment or referral is needed. Shingles People aged 18 and over Assess a suspected episode and consider time-sensitive treatment or referral. Uncomplicated urinary tract infection (UTI) Women aged 16 to 64 who meet the pathway criteria Assess urinary symptoms and decide whether treatment or another care route is appropriate.

What each Pharmacy First pathway involves

Sinusitis

Sinusitis can cause a blocked or runny nose, facial pressure or pain, reduced sense of smell and sometimes a headache. Many cases improve without antibiotics. A pharmacist can discuss symptom relief and assess whether the pattern and duration of symptoms meet the pathway criteria for further treatment. They can also advise when symptoms warrant GP review or more urgent care.

Sore throat

A sore throat is often caused by a virus and gets better on its own. The pharmacist will ask about symptoms and may use a structured assessment to help judge whether a bacterial infection is more likely. They can explain self-care options and decide whether treatment under the pathway is suitable. A severe or rapidly worsening sore throat may need a different level of care.

Earache in children and young people

The earache pathway is for acute otitis media in people aged 1 to 17. It is not a general pathway for every ear problem, and the pharmacist will check symptoms and eligibility before recommending treatment. Very young babies, children who seem seriously unwell, or symptoms suggesting a complication need prompt medical attention rather than an assumption that a pharmacy visit is enough.

Infected insect bites

Most bites are not infected, even if they are itchy, swollen or red. The pharmacist can assess whether signs point to infection, discuss ways to relieve irritation and advise on treatment if the person meets the pathway criteria. Seek medical advice if redness or swelling spreads quickly, the person becomes unwell, or there are signs of a serious allergic reaction.

Impetigo

Impetigo is a contagious skin infection that often causes sores or blisters, commonly around the nose and mouth. The pharmacist can assess whether the symptoms are consistent with impetigo and advise on hygiene to reduce spread, as well as suitable treatment or referral. Avoid sharing towels and wash hands regularly while seeking advice.

Shingles

Shingles usually causes a painful rash, often in a strip on one side of the body. The **pharmacy first shingles** pathway is for adults aged 18 and over. Because treatment may be time-sensitive and some people are at greater risk of complications, contact a pharmacist promptly if shingles is suspected. A pharmacist may refer you for urgent or specialist assessment if the rash or health circumstances make the pathway unsuitable.

Uncomplicated UTI

The **pharmacy first UTI** pathway is for women aged 16 to 64 with symptoms that fit the service criteria. It is not intended for every urinary symptom or every person with a UTI. Pregnancy, recurrent infections, some long-term conditions and symptoms such as fever or pain in the side or back may mean a different assessment is needed. The pharmacist will ask questions to check whether the pathway is appropriate and refer if necessary.

When Pharmacy First is not the right route

Age limits are only part of the eligibility rules. A pharmacist may not be able to manage a condition through Pharmacy First if symptoms are severe, the person has a relevant health condition, there may be a complication, or the symptoms do not match the pathway. They may also need to check medicines, allergies or other factors before recommending treatment.

Call 999 for a life-threatening emergency. For urgent advice that cannot wait for a routine appointment, use NHS 111 or follow the pharmacist's advice about where to go. Do not delay urgent care while trying to fit symptoms into a Pharmacy First category.

How to use the service

1. **Check the pathway.** Confirm that the condition and age group are covered using NHS information or by contacting a local participating pharmacy.
2. **Contact the pharmacy.** Some pharmacies accept walk-ins; others may ask you to call or arrange a consultation. Availability can vary with staffing and demand.
3. **Give a clear account of symptoms.** Explain when they started, how they have changed and any medicines, allergies or relevant health conditions.
4. **Follow the outcome.** The pharmacist may recommend self-care, supply treatment if appropriate, or arrange or advise onward referral.

You can also contact a pharmacy after being referred through NHS 111 or another NHS service. If a referral is made, take any information you have been given and tell the pharmacist if symptoms have changed.



Pharmacy services beyond dispensing

Pharmacy First is one part of a broader shift towards community pharmacies providing accessible clinical care. Pharmacies can offer confidential advice about medicines and minor illnesses, support people to use treatments safely, and signpost to other NHS services. The precise services available depend on the pharmacy, local arrangements and the type of care needed.

Vaccination is another important area. Participating pharmacies may offer **flu vaccinations** to people who meet the NHS eligibility rules, or provide them privately. Some also provide **travel vaccinations**. Which vaccines are available, whether they are NHS-funded or privately paid for, and how far ahead to book can vary, so check directly with the provider.

A **travel health consultation with risk assessment** can help identify recommended vaccines and other precautions for a particular trip. A pharmacist or travel health provider may ask about your destination, itinerary, length of stay, activities, medical history and previous vaccinations. This is different from the Pharmacy First clinical pathways: travel health is a separate service, and a consultation does not necessarily mean every recommended vaccine can be given at that pharmacy.

Common mistake: assuming prices were stated

No prices were stated in the scraped content. That means it would be misleading to infer or invent a charge from information that does not include one. NHS Pharmacy First is an NHS service in England for eligible patients, but charges and eligibility can differ for medicines, private consultations and vaccinations. Some vaccines may be available through NHS arrangements, while others are offered privately.

Before booking a private **infected insect bite pharmacy** vaccination or travel health appointment, ask the provider what the consultation costs, whether each vaccine is charged separately, and whether follow-up doses are included. For Pharmacy First, ask the pharmacy if you are unsure how the NHS service applies to your circumstances or whether a recommended medicine is subject to a charge.

The takeaway

The key **pharmacy first conditions** are sinusitis, sore throat, earache in children and young people, infected insect bites, impetigo, shingles and uncomplicated UTIs in eligible women. The service can provide faster access to assessment and treatment for some common problems, but it is not a guaranteed prescription or a substitute for urgent care.

For the latest eligibility details, use NHS England and the NHS Pharmacy First information, then contact a participating pharmacy. If you are arranging flu vaccinations, travel vaccinations or a travel health consultation with risk assessment, check availability, eligibility and any costs directly with the provider.