

Information for new patients in the United Kingdom

All people who are new to the UK are offered tests to look for infections. Some infections may not make you feel unwell now but could harm you if not found early.

The infections we test for have treatments to cure or control the infection.

The tests and treatments are free. Information about your tests and your results will not be shared with people, outside the National Health Service (NHS), without your consent. If you have any of these infections it will not prevent you applying to remain in the UK.

Different areas of the UK offer a different range of tests. Below is a list of tests offered to most people arriving in the UK for the first time. Being tested is optional. We advise tests to protect your health in the future.

Most tests are done by taking a small amount of blood from you, which your body will easily and quickly replace without you coming to any harm. Some tests require a urine sample.

All new arrivals to the UK have the right to register for a GP (a family doctor who can give you medical help and advice, for free, in your local community).

Tuberculosis

What is it?

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infection caused by bacteria which are released into the air when someone with an infection coughs or sneezes. Pulmonary TB (in the lungs or throat) is the only form of the illness that is infectious, but TB can affect any part of the body. If left untreated, TB is a serious illness, but it is curable with antibiotics. We will ask you questions to assess if you could have active TB. We may offer you a chest x-ray or other investigations to find out if you have it. You may not have active (infectious) TB, but you may have been exposed to it in the past ('latent TB').

How could I catch it?

TB spreads between people in the air. People with TB may not know they are ill at the time and you may have been exposed to the illness without knowing it.

What treatment is available?

TB can be fatal without treatment but can be cured with tablets. Treatment is usually effective however it lasts at least 6 months and may be longer depending on where TB is found in the body. Treatment for TB is usually a mixture of 4 antibiotics. After 2 months of being on this treatment, patients may then be moved on to a course of 2 antibiotics for at least 4 months. In the UK, TB treatment is free to everyone, regardless of immigration status.

Can it be prevented?

If you have latent TB, treatment will prevent you from developing infectious TB. If you have active (infectious) TB, you should isolate until you are no longer infectious. This is usually only a few

weeks and you will be supported throughout your isolation.

Infections found in your blood

HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C viruses can pass from person to person through blood, semen or vaginal fluids. These viruses can pass:

- From mother to baby during birth or infancy
- By having sex without a condom
- By sharing items contaminated with infected blood e.g. needles, or razors.

Hepatitis B

What is it?

Hepatitis B virus can infect the liver. Many people will clear the virus without treatment, but in some people, the virus can cause liver damage and liver cancer. In most people it will cause no symptoms so you may not know if you have it.

What treatment is available?

Hepatitis B does not have a cure, but it can be controlled. If you have a high level of Hepatitis B virus or any liver damage, you will be offered treatment with tablets to control the virus. Treatment can prevent liver failure and liver cancer. Your doctor or nurse specialist will give you more information about treatment if it is required.

Can it be prevented?

A vaccine to protect you from Hepatitis B is available and is free of charge.

Hepatitis C

What is it?

Hepatitis C is a virus which affects the liver. Many people do not have symptoms until the liver has been significantly damaged. A blood test is the only way to know you have the virus.

What treatment is available?

Hepatitis C can be treated with antiviral tablets over 8–12 weeks. This usually cures the infection. Early treatment will prevent serious complications such as liver damage, liver failure or liver cancer.

Can it be prevented?

There is currently no vaccine or medications available to prevent you being infected with this virus. Being treated for the infection does not prevent you from acquiring it again in future.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

What is it?

HIV is a virus which over time can affect your immune system, which is your body's ability to protect you from infections. You often do not feel unwell straight away. However, if you have this infection, you can be given treatment which controls the virus. This stops it from causing you harm and prevents you from passing it on to other people.

What treatment is available?

There are different treatments available, usually a single tablet once a day. This cannot cure the infection but can control the virus so that we can no longer detect it in the blood, and it cannot pass on to other people. If treatment is started early, you can have a normal life expectancy and your immune system function will stabilise and, in most cases, improve.

Can it be prevented?

There is no vaccine currently available. If you are at risk of HIV, you can get medication to reduce the risk of infection.

What am I entitled to?

- Free HIV treatment and follow-up
- If you are found to have acquired HIV this does not affect your right to apply for asylum in the UK
- Your HIV status will not affect your right to work in the UK
- You will have access to free specialist care with regular, private and confidential follow up from non-hostile and non-judgmental health care professionals.

If you already know you have HIV, it is important that you tell your GP as soon as possible so you can continue treatment and see an infection specialist.

Syphilis

What is it?

Syphilis is a bacterial infection passed through sexual contact. Symptoms change over time and can include painless sores or ulcers, swollen lymph glands, fever and weight loss. Symptoms can involve all parts of the body at different stages, but some people do not have any symptoms. If you have a sexual partner, they will also need to be tested for syphilis and they will be offered testing and treatment. If you are pregnant and have syphilis, you can pass it onto the baby before it's born and increase the risk of miscarriage, premature birth and stillbirth.

How could I catch it?

You can get syphilis by having vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone who has the infection.

What treatment is available?

Syphilis is curable with antibiotics which are usually given by injection. You may need to get repeat testing at 6 and 12 weeks after treatment to ensure the infection has been cured.

Can it be prevented?

There is currently no vaccine or medication available to prevent you from getting this infection. Syphilis can be prevented by using condoms when you have sex, and also by getting tested once a year, or if you have a new sexual partner.

Strongyloides

What is it?

Strongyloides is a parasitic worm which usually lives in soil (but is too small to see) and infects you through your skin. It enters your lungs and intestines through your bloodstream. It can cause skin or digestive symptoms that can come and go. Some infections can become chronic and last for years or even be fatal. Tests for Strongyloides include testing different bodily fluids for signs of the worm, such as stool and blood.

How could I catch it?

Walking barefoot in contaminated soil in tropical and subtropical locations or having a weakened immune system can put you at risk of getting Strongyloides infection.

What treatment is available?

Strongyloides is easily treated with an anti-parasitic medication in tablet form.

Can it be prevented?

Strongyloidiasis can't always be prevented. However not walking barefoot when traveling to warm or tropical climates can reduce your risk of infection.

Schistosomiasis

What is it?

Schistosomiasis, sometimes known as bilharzia, is an infection caused by a parasitic worm. The parasite lives in fresh water (such as rivers and lakes) in subtropical and tropical regions. Symptoms may include a red itchy rash, high temperature, cough, diarrhoea, abdomen and joint pain. The parasite can remain in the body for many years and cause damage to the bladder, kidneys and liver and some types increase your risk of developing bladder cancer. Schistosomiasis is usually diagnosed by a blood test but can also be diagnosed by finding parasite eggs in your urine or stool sample.

How could I catch it?

You become infected if you come into contact with contaminated fresh water in subtropical and tropical regions, for example when swimming, paddling or washing.

What treatment is available?

It can be cured with a short course of an anti-parasitic medication. Sometimes treatments may need to be repeated after a few weeks.

Can it be prevented?

There is currently no vaccine or medication available to prevent you from getting this infection. People who travel to areas affected by schistosomiasis should avoid swimming, drinking and washing in fresh water that is likely to be contaminated.

Infections detected in your urine

Chlamydia and Gonorrhea

What is it?

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are common sexually transmitted bacterial infections. Symptoms of both include pain when urinating, unusual discharge from the vagina, penis or anus, stomach pain, pain in the testicles or red eyes. However they can also be asymptomatic (show no symptoms). The test for chlamydia and gonorrhea is simple and painless. It involves swabbing the affected areas (vagina, anus, throat) and/or giving a urine sample. You can perform the swab yourself and it will be explained to you how to do this at your appointment.

How could I catch it?

They are both passed on through unprotected (without a condom) vaginal, anal or oral sex.

What treatment is available?

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are treated with antibiotics but if left untreated can be passed on to other sexual partners. You should avoid having sex for 1 week after you and your partners have been treated. Some strains of gonorrhea have become resistant to antibiotics, and you may require repeat testing 3 weeks after treatment to make sure the antibiotics have worked.

Can it be prevented?

Chlamydia and gonorrhea can be prevented by using condoms when you have sex. Getting tested once a year, or if you have a new sexual partner, can prevent the spread of infection.

Testing, treatment and all forms of contraception including condoms are free in the UK. You can get access to them from your GP or local sexual health clinic.

Interpretation and Translation

This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language and, if necessary, we will provide an appropriate interpreter for appointments. Please speak to a member of staff.