In many cases, you can walk into a participating community pharmacy and ask about **NHS Pharmacy First**. You usually do not need to book in advance, but that does not guarantee you will be seen immediately: the pharmacist may be with another patient, the consultation room may be in use, or the pharmacy may not be offering the service at that time. Some pharmacies let you book a **pharmacy first appointment**, and others may suggest coming back later.

The short answer is: **you can often walk in, but it is sensible to check first**—especially if you are making a special journey, need a particular time, or are asking about a service other than Pharmacy First. This guide explains how the NHS service works in England, what pharmacists can help with, and when booking or another route to care may be more appropriate.

What is NHS Pharmacy First?

NHS Pharmacy First is an England-wide service that gives people access to advice and treatment for certain common conditions through participating community pharmacies. It is designed to make it easier to get help without always needing to arrange a GP appointment first. Depending on your symptoms and circumstances, the pharmacist can assess you, give self-care advice, recommend an over-the-counter treatment or, when clinically appropriate, supply a prescription-only medicine under the service.

Pharmacy First is part of a broader shift in primary care: community pharmacists do more than dispense prescriptions. They are trained healthcare professionals who can help people understand symptoms, use medicines safely and decide what to do next. They can also identify when a problem needs medical assessment elsewhere and direct or refer you appropriately.

The service is not a replacement for every GP appointment, and it does not mean that everyone who attends will receive a medicine. The pharmacist's assessment determines what is suitable. Antibiotics, for example, are only supplied when the clinical criteria are met; they are not automatic for a sore throat, sinus symptoms or another infection.

Can I walk in for a Pharmacy First consultation?

Usually, yes. You can ask at the counter or contact the pharmacy to say you would like a Pharmacy First assessment. A walk-in pharmacy consultation may be possible on the day, but the team might need to check whether the pharmacist is available and whether your symptoms fall within the service.

There is no single booking system used by every pharmacy. Some accept walk-ins throughout opening hours, some ask patients to book, and some offer a mixture—for example, walk-ins when a pharmacist is free and appointments at busier times. A pharmacy may also temporarily be unable to provide the service because of staffing or other operational pressures.

Before travelling, check the pharmacy's website or call ahead. You can ask:

- Do you provide NHS Pharmacy First?
- Can I walk in today, or do I need to book a pharmacy first appointment?
- Is a consultation available at the time I need?
- What information or identification should I bring?

You can also use the **NHS England** Pharmacy First information and the NHS pharmacy finder to learn about the service and locate a participating pharmacy. Local arrangements can still differ, so it is worth confirming directly with the pharmacy before setting off.

What conditions can a pharmacy treat through Pharmacy First?

In England, the Pharmacy First clinical pathways cover seven common conditions. The pharmacist will ask about your symptoms, medical history and any medicines you take. They may also check your temperature or examine the affected area, depending on the problem and what is clinically appropriate.

Condition Who may be eligible What the pharmacist may do Sinusitis People aged 12 and over Assess symptoms, advise on self-care and decide whether treatment or onward care is needed. Sore throat People aged 5 and over Assess the throat and symptoms, then recommend appropriate care or treatment if indicated. Earache Children and young people aged 1 to 17 Assess symptoms and advise on suitable treatment or further medical assessment. Infected insect bites People aged 1 and over Check the bite and surrounding skin and advise on treatment or escalation. Impetigo People aged 1 and over Assess the skin condition and recommend treatment when appropriate. Shingles People aged 18 and over Assess the rash and symptoms and consider whether treatment or urgent review is needed. Uncomplicated urinary tract infection (UTI) Women aged 16 to 64 who meet the service criteria Ask about symptoms and relevant health factors, then advise or treat if suitable.

Age limits are not the only criteria. Your symptoms, how long you have had them, other health conditions, pregnancy, allergies and medicines can all affect whether Pharmacy First is the right route. The pharmacist may decide that you need a GP, NHS 111, an urgent treatment centre or another service instead.

What happens during a walk-in pharmacy consultation?

Pharmacy First consultations are private. The pharmacist will normally speak with you in a consultation room or another suitable private area. They will ask questions to understand what is happening, check for warning signs and establish whether the service is appropriate.

If you are eligible, the pharmacist will explain the options. These could include self-care, a non-prescription medicine, a prescription-only medicine supplied under the service, or a recommendation to seek further assessment. If the pharmacist thinks your symptoms may be serious, they will explain how urgently you need to get help and where to go.

It healthylifeessex.co.uk can help to have the following information ready:

- When your symptoms started and whether they are getting better or worse.
- Any medicines, supplements or allergies you have.
- Relevant health conditions, including pregnancy where applicable.
- Any treatment you have already tried.
- Your NHS number, if you know it; not knowing it should not stop you asking for advice.

For children, a parent or carer may be asked to provide details and support the consultation. The pharmacist will explain if they need more information or if a different service is better suited to the child’s symptoms.



When should I book instead of walking in?

For Pharmacy First, booking depends on the individual pharmacy's arrangements. If you have a tight schedule, need an accessible appointment, or would rather know when you will be seen, call ahead and ask whether you can book. If the pharmacy offers appointments, it may be able to reserve a time; if not, staff can tell you the best time to attend or advise you about another local provider.

Booking is particularly worth considering for services that are separate from Pharmacy First. Not every pharmacy offers every service, and vaccinations or travel advice may require a planned appointment, a pre-travel health assessment or time to obtain suitable vaccines. Do not assume that a pharmacy offering Pharmacy First also provides every vaccination or travel service.

Pharmacies may offer **flu vaccinations** and **travel vaccinations**, as well as **travel health consultations with risk assessment**. Availability, eligibility, consultation arrangements and any charges depend on the particular service and provider. For travel health, allow time before departure: some vaccines need more than one dose or need to be given well ahead of travel. Take details of your destination, dates, planned activities and previous vaccinations to the consultation.

Is Pharmacy First free?

NHS Pharmacy First consultations are provided through the NHS service for eligible patients in England. If a medicine is supplied, the rules for any prescription charge or exemption can depend on the circumstances and the way the medicine is provided. Ask the pharmacist to explain whether a charge applies to your situation.

Other pharmacy services, including some private vaccinations and travel health consultations, may have a fee. **No prices were stated in the scraped content**, so it would be misleading to quote a price here. Charges vary between providers and services; contact the pharmacy directly for current prices and ask what the fee includes before booking.

When is a pharmacy not the right place to go?

Pharmacy First is intended for specified conditions and suitable patients. It is not an emergency service. If you have severe symptoms, a rapidly worsening condition, or you are worried that someone may be seriously unwell, seek urgent medical help rather than waiting for a routine pharmacy consultation.

Call 999 for a life-threatening emergency. If you need urgent advice but it is not an emergency, contact NHS 111 or use the NHS 111 online service. A pharmacist can also help you decide whether to seek further care, but do not delay urgent help while trying to arrange a pharmacy appointment.



For symptoms outside the Pharmacy First pathways, a pharmacist may still be able to offer general advice or suggest self-care, but they may not be able to provide the specific NHS assessment or treatment you need. Depending on the issue, contact your GP practice, NHS 111 or another appropriate service.

How to make your visit go smoothly

1. **Check the service.** Confirm that the pharmacy provides Pharmacy First and is currently able to offer consultations.
2. **Ask about access.** Find out whether you can walk in or should book a pharmacy first appointment.
3. **Explain the main concern.** Tell the team which condition you are asking about and who the consultation is for.
4. **Bring useful details.** Be ready to discuss symptoms, medicines, allergies and relevant medical history.
5. **Follow the advice.** Ask what to do if symptoms do not improve, get worse or return.

If the pharmacy cannot see you immediately, ask when to come back or whether another local pharmacy has availability. If your symptoms change or become more serious while you are waiting, seek advice through the appropriate urgent-care route.

The bottom line

You can often walk into a participating pharmacy for NHS Pharmacy First in England, and you generally do not need a GP referral to ask for an assessment. However, walk-in availability is not guaranteed, and booking practices differ from one pharmacy to another. Calling ahead is the simplest way to check.

Pharmacy First can provide faster access for assessment of seven common conditions, while community pharmacies may also offer other services such as vaccinations and travel health support. Those additional services may need a separate appointment and could involve charges. Check with the pharmacy for availability, eligibility and prices—and seek urgent help if symptoms are severe or rapidly worsening.