

Cystic Fibrosis and prescription charges

Introduction

Prescription charges have now been abolished entirely for people in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. However in England many people with Cystic Fibrosis still have to pay for their prescriptions. This factsheet provides information about prescription charges, including:

- The current situation regarding prescription charges in the UK
- Who is exempt from prescription charges
- Why Cystic Fibrosis is not exempt
- How prescription charges work
- Costs of prescriptions and pre-payment certificates in England
- The Government's position
- The Cystic Fibrosis Trust's position

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Prescription charges in the UK

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, prescription charges have been abolished entirely, meaning no-one in those countries has to pay for their prescriptions.

In England, despite Government pledges to abolish prescription charges for all long-term conditions, many people with Cystic Fibrosis still have to pay for their prescriptions.

Who is exempt from prescription charges in England?

People over 60 or under 16 years of age, as well as those on means tested benefits, are exempt from paying prescription charges.

People with certain medical conditions, such as diabetes and cancer, are also exempt from paying prescription charges.

Some adults with Cystic Fibrosis are exempt from prescription charges for other reasons, such as those still in higher education and on income support, or those too ill to work and those on very low income. Some who are in receipt of state benefits such as Disability Living Allowance still have to pay prescription charges.

Why is Cystic Fibrosis not exempt?

As mentioned, people with certain medical conditions are exempt from paying prescription charges. However, the list of exempt conditions does not include Cystic Fibrosis. This is because the exempt list was drawn up over 40 years ago, in 1968, when most children with CF did not live until adulthood. Fortunately the outlook for people with Cystic Fibrosis has improved markedly since then and most people with CF live until adulthood, although still with a reduced life expectancy compared with the population as a whole. However the list of exempt conditions has not been properly revised since 1968 and therefore does not take account of this.

Many people with Cystic Fibrosis have to pay for all of their prescriptions unless they develop diabetes, a complication of Cystic Fibrosis which affects about 15% of people with CF and which is included on the exempt list.

How do prescription charges work?

Once a person is on the exempt list, they get their prescriptions for everything, including all other routine complaints such as coughs and colds, free of charge.

For those who do have to pay, there are two methods of payment: single items can be purchased as and when required, or a pre-payment certificate (PPC) can be purchased which will cover costs for three, four or 12 months and works out cheaper if a lot of prescriptions are required.

What are the current prescription charges in England?

The current prescription charges in England, as of 1 April 2012, are as follows:

Single prescription £7.65
Three-month PPC £29.10
12-month PPC £104.00

The Government's position

In September 2008, the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown pledged that prescription charges for all those with long-term conditions would be abolished 'over the next few years', and commissioned a review to consider how this pledge could be implemented. The Prescription Charges Review, which was undertaken by the Royal College of Physicians, was published in May 2010. Unfortunately, in the Spending Review of autumn 2010 undertaken by the new coalition Government, it was announced that the pledge to abolish prescription charges for all those with long-term conditions would not be taken forward.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust's position

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust believes that all adults with Cystic Fibrosis should be exempt from prescription charges, wherever they live in the UK, for the following reasons:

- 1 Cystic Fibrosis is a life-threatening medical condition for which daily medication is essential. Adults with Cystic Fibrosis are often considerably disadvantaged in economic terms by their condition. Further financial hardship is caused by having to pay prescription charges.
- 2 For those adults with Cystic Fibrosis who are in financial difficulty, there is a danger that having to pay for prescriptions may act as a disincentive to take essential treatment.
- 3 It is illogical and unjust that others with similar or less serious conditions are exempt from prescription charges whilst those with Cystic Fibrosis are not.

4 Cystic Fibrosis meets the requirements laid down by the British Medical Association in 1968 and accepted by the Government as criteria for exemption, specifically that conditions to be included on the exempt list should be “readily identifiable conditions, which in virtually all cases call automatically for prolonged continuous medication.”

Cystic Fibrosis fulfils all of these conditions. The only reason CF was not on the list in 1968 is that all children were exempt from prescription charges, thereby including all those with Cystic Fibrosis at the time.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust has consulted extensively with consultants caring for people with Cystic Fibrosis, adults with CF, families of people with CF and professional bodies involved in healthcare. All consulted agree that Cystic Fibrosis meets the criteria for inclusion in the exempt list. We assume, therefore, that the Government has received no advice from any professional body that it would be inappropriate to include Cystic Fibrosis on the exempt list.

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust does not accept that an adjustment to the exempt list could not or should not be made for Cystic Fibrosis because of a lack of consensus on other conditions.

It is wrong to continue to discriminate against these young adults who clearly meet the criteria of the exempt list, and who may not be covered by any other category of exemption.

We expect the Government to act because our case is clear cut and just. We want to help and we are prepared to co-operate with the Government in a positive and constructive way. However, a charity cannot and should not be expected to do the job of the NHS or the Government. The current arrangements for prescription charges for adults with Cystic Fibrosis are demonstrably unjustifiable. Prescription charges for those with Cystic Fibrosis should be abolished without further delay.

Further information

For further information about any aspect of Cystic Fibrosis, please contact:

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Helplines

General helpline 0300 373 1000

A confidential service offering advice, support and information on any aspect of Cystic Fibrosis, including benefits and welfare grants.

Other publications

The Cystic Fibrosis Trust publishes a range of publications on a wide variety of topics relating to Cystic Fibrosis. You can view our complete publications list, order publications and download publications free of charge from the CF Trust website www.cftrust.org.uk/publications. Alternatively, you can telephone the CF Trust switchboard on 020 8464 7211.

We would welcome your feedback on this or any other Cystic Fibrosis Trust publications. Please email publications@cftrust.org.uk.

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