

Introduction to the Community Pharmacy Contraception Service

The aim of the Pharmacy Contraception Service (PCS) is to widen access to contraception services by enabling community pharmacies to initiate and supply oral contraception and emergency contraception, thereby offering patients more choice in where they receive care. It also aims to create additional capacity in primary care and sexual health clinics (or equivalent) to support meeting the demand for more complex assessments.

Launched originally for ongoing supplies of oral contraception (OC) from 24 April 2023. The service expanded on 1st December 2023 to include initiation of OC, And as of 29th October 2025 (go-live date for the latest version) the service includes three key elements:

- Ongoing supply of oral contraception
- Initiation of oral contraception
- Oral emergency contraception (EC)

Who can access the service?

Individuals can access the service by any of the following routes:

- Identified as clinically suitable by the pharmacist and accepts the offer of the service;
- Self-refer to a community pharmacy;
- Referred by their general practice;
- Referred from a sexual health clinic (or equivalent); or
- Referred from other NHS service providers, e.g. urgent treatment centres or NHS 111.

Note: for the purposes of this service, a referral includes active signposting to attend the pharmacy to receive the service.

The pharmacy must respond to anybody requesting the service as soon as is reasonably possible. Following discussion, if the pharmacy is unable to offer a consultation within the time needed to meet the person's contraception need, they should be signposted to an alternative pharmacy or other service for a consultation.

This is an NHS service and so the supply of oral contraception will be exempt from any prescription charges.

Individuals do not need to be registered with a GP to access this service.

Pharmacies will only inform the GP practice that individuals have accessed the service, with their consent.

To be eligible to access this service, a person must be an individual seeking:

- to be **initiated** on an oral contraception (OC), or
- to obtain a **further supply** of their ongoing OC, or
- to access **oral emergency contraception (EC)** as part of the Pharmacy Contraception Service.

This applies to:

- Combined Oral Contraceptive (COC) – from menarche up to and including **49 years of age**; or
- Progestogen-Only Pill (POP) – from menarche up to and including **54 years of age**; or
- Oral Emergency Contraception (EC) – from menarche (i.e. onset of menstruation) for any individual of **childbearing potential** who requires EC following unprotected sexual intercourse or contraceptive failure.

How do I refer a patient to a pharmacy?

Please communicate with your local pharmacies to discuss mutually acceptable ways of referrals from GP surgery.

Referrals using AccuRx or NHS mail are very quick and secure way of communication. EMIS practices will have inbuilt template for referrals.

What are the benefits for the Practice and its Patients?

The Pharmacy Contraception Service will;

- **Enhance patient access to care** - Collaborative working with community pharmacies enables quicker access to contraception services, particularly for patients who may face delays accessing in practice appointments.
- **Optimise clinical capacity** - Systematic referral to pharmacy can help reduce demand on GP, practice nurse, and pharmacist appointments, allowing greater capacity to focus on more complex cases.

What will the pharmacy do?

The clinical appropriateness of a supply of OC or EC will be determined by the pharmacist, as part of a consultation with the individual, following the guidelines set out in the relevant Patient Group Direction (PGD).

The service involves community pharmacists providing:

- **Initiation:** where a person wishes to start oral contraception (OC) for the first time or needs to restart OC following a pill-free break. A person who is being switched to an alternative pill following consultation can also be considered as an initiation.
- **Ongoing supply:** where a person has been supplied with OC by a primary care provider or a sexual health clinic (or equivalent) and a subsequent equivalent supply is needed. Their current supply of OC should still be in use.
- **Emergency Contraception (EC):** where a person requires oral emergency contraception following unprotected sexual intercourse or contraceptive failure. The pharmacist will assess clinical suitability and, where appropriate, supply EC in line with the PGD. The consultation also provides an opportunity to discuss ongoing contraceptive needs and, if suitable, initiate or continue regular OC.

The NHS Community Pharmacy Contraception Service [advanced service specification](#) outlines the information that is required to be collected as part of the service.

Which pharmacies are delivering this service?

[NHS Service Finder](#): NHS Service Finder is a free tool for healthcare staff to locate live NHS services near a specific postcode. To find participating pharmacies, search for 'Contraception' under Type of Service.

How can we promote this service to patients?

Raising awareness of the Pharmacy Contraception Service is key to encouraging appropriate use and supporting patient understanding.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Community Pharmacy England (CPE) have released a range of promotional materials to help inform patients and the public. These include posters, flyers, social media graphics, and a press release template, all available for download: [Pharmacy Contraception Service \(PCS\) - Community Pharmacy England](#).

Where can I share positive learnings or raise concerns?

If you would like to share positive experiences, examples of good practice, or raise any concerns, please include as much detail as possible—such as the name of the pharmacy, a brief summary of events, and any relevant dates.

For service delivery or contractual matters, please contact the South Yorkshire ICB Primary Care Team at: syicb.syprimarycare@nhs.net

For clinical queries related to the service, contact: Claire Thomas – claire.thomas47@nhs.net

For support with implementing referrals or collaboration with community pharmacies, contact: Community Pharmacy South Yorkshire (CPSY) – info@cpsy.org.uk