A urinary tract infection (UTI) can be uncomfortable, and getting advice promptly matters. In England, **NHS Pharmacy First** lets eligible people with suspected uncomplicated UTIs speak to a participating community pharmacist without first booking a GP appointment. The pharmacist can assess symptoms, offer advice and, if appropriate, supply treatment under the service's clinical rules.

But Pharmacy First is not the right route for everyone. Some symptoms need urgent medical assessment, and certain people are more likely to have a complicated infection. Knowing when to ask a pharmacist, contact your GP or NHS 111, or seek emergency help can make the next step clearer.

This guide explains how the service works, which UTI symptoms are red flags and what else community pharmacies may offer beyond dispensing medicines.

What does NHS Pharmacy First offer for UTIs?

Community pharmacies do much more than hand out prescriptions. Under the NHS Pharmacy First service in England, pharmacists can assess and treat certain common conditions, following specific clinical pathways. These include uncomplicated UTIs in eligible women, as well as conditions such as sinusitis, sore throat, earache, impetigo and shingles. Which services are available may depend on the condition, the person's age and the pharmacy.



For a suspected UTI, the pharmacist will ask about your symptoms, medical history, medicines and relevant risk factors. They may check whether you meet the service criteria and whether a different kind of care is safer. Depending on the assessment, they may provide self-care advice, supply an antibiotic where appropriate, or recommend that you contact another NHS service.

The UTI pathway is generally intended for women aged 16 to 64 with symptoms of an uncomplicated lower UTI. It is not an automatic antibiotic service: an assessment comes first, and treatment depends on the clinical picture. If you are outside the eligible group, that does not mean your symptoms should be ignored. It means a GP or another appropriate clinician may need to assess you instead.

Rules and pathways can differ across the UK. NHS Pharmacy First is the service in England; people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should check the arrangements where they live. NHS England and the NHS website provide information about the service and how to find participating pharmacies.

Typical UTI symptoms a pharmacist may assess

A lower UTI, often called cystitis, can cause one or more of the following:

- Pain, stinging or burning when you pass urine.
- Needing to urinate more often or more urgently than usual.
- Urine that looks cloudy or has a stronger smell than usual.
- Pain or discomfort low in the tummy.
- Feeling generally unwell alongside urinary symptoms.

These symptoms do not prove that you have a UTI. Other conditions can cause similar problems, and a pharmacist may decide that you need another type of assessment. Be ready to describe when symptoms began, whether they are getting worse, and whether you have had UTIs before.

UTI red flags UK: when to seek help instead

Some symptoms suggest the infection may have spread beyond the bladder, or that a more serious problem needs to be ruled out. If you have UTI symptoms with any of the following, seek prompt medical advice rather than relying on Pharmacy First alone:

- **Fever, shivering or feeling unusually hot and cold.**
- **Pain in your back or side, just under the ribs.**
- **Nausea or vomiting**, particularly if you cannot keep fluids or medicines down.
- **Visible blood in your urine.**
- **Symptoms that are rapidly getting worse** or severe pain.

These can be signs of a kidney infection or another condition that needs prompt assessment. Contact your GP practice urgently or call NHS 111 if you cannot get timely advice from your practice. If you are very unwell, confused, unusually drowsy, breathing rapidly, or feel you may be seriously ill, call 999 or go to A&E. Do not wait for a routine pharmacy appointment if you think it may be an emergency.

Blood in the urine should be checked even if it is the only symptom or it happens once. It can have different causes, so a clinician needs to advise you on what to do next. Do not assume it is simply part of a UTI.



Who should usually contact a GP or another clinician?

Pharmacy First has eligibility criteria. A GP or other clinician may be more appropriate if you:

- Are pregnant, or could be pregnant.
- Are a man, are under 16, or are aged 65 or over.
- Have repeated UTIs, or symptoms that keep returning.
- Have a urinary catheter, a known problem with your urinary tract, or a history of kidney problems.
- Have a condition or treatment that affects your immune system, or another significant health condition that may change how an infection should be managed.
- Have symptoms that do not fit a straightforward lower UTI, or have already tried treatment without improvement.

This list is not a diagnosis or a complete set of service rules. The pharmacist can explain whether the Pharmacy First pathway is suitable and arrange or recommend a pharmacy referral to GP services, NHS 111 or another clinician when needed. If you are unsure, describe your symptoms and health circumstances rather than deciding for yourself that you are ineligible.

What happens during a pharmacy assessment?

You can usually contact a participating pharmacy directly, although some pharmacies ask people to book or use an online consultation route. The pharmacist will speak with you privately and ask questions to understand what is happening. You may be asked about:

- Your symptoms, how long you have had them and whether they are worsening.
- Any fever, back or side pain, vomiting or blood in your urine.
- Pregnancy, allergies, medicines and relevant medical conditions.
- Previous UTIs and any treatment you have used.

Be as open as you can. These questions help the pharmacist decide whether they can manage the problem safely or whether you need a different service. A pharmacist may recommend contacting your GP even if you were

hoping for treatment at the pharmacy. That is a safety decision, not a sign that your concerns are being dismissed.

If you are treated, follow the pharmacist's instructions and the medicine information supplied. Ask what to do if you miss a dose, have a side effect or are taking other medicines. If symptoms worsen at any time, seek advice. If they have not started to improve within 48 hours of starting treatment, contact a GP or NHS 111 for further assessment.

What to do while you are waiting for advice

For mild symptoms, drinking enough fluid to avoid dehydration and using a suitable pain relief medicine may help. Check with a pharmacist or clinician before taking a medicine if you are pregnant, have a long-term condition, take regular medicines or are unsure whether it is suitable for you. Do not use leftover antibiotics or someone else's medicine: the wrong treatment may not help and can cause harm.

Do not delay seeking care because you are trying home remedies. In particular, fever, pain under the ribs, vomiting or feeling seriously unwell needs prompt attention. A clinician can advise whether you need treatment, tests or another kind of assessment.

Pharmacies can support health in other ways, too

Pharmacy First is part of a broader shift towards making more NHS care available in the community. Pharmacists can offer advice on medicines and minor illnesses, and may help people navigate the right service when a problem needs further assessment. This can provide a convenient first point of contact, but it does not replace a GP for every concern or mean that every pharmacy offers every service.

Some pharmacies also provide vaccinations and travel health support. Depending on the pharmacy and local arrangements, services may include NHS flu vaccinations, private flu vaccinations, travel vaccinations, and travel health consultations with risk assessment. A travel consultation can help identify which vaccinations or other precautions may be relevant to your destination, itinerary and health history. Availability, eligibility and arrangements vary, so check directly with the pharmacy before attending.

These services illustrate how community pharmacy has expanded beyond dispensing. They do not change the need to get urgent medical help for serious symptoms. If you are unwell with a possible UTI and also have a travel appointment or vaccination booked, tell the pharmacist about your symptoms and ask what should happen next.

Costs and checking service details

No prices were stated in the scraped content. That means a price should not be guessed or presented as fact. NHS Pharmacy First is an NHS service in England, but costs and charges can depend on the service, the medicine supplied and your circumstances. Some vaccination or travel health services may be private. Ask the pharmacy what is included and whether any charge applies before booking or receiving a non-NHS service.

For current information, check NHS England or the NHS website for Pharmacy First details, and contact your local pharmacy to confirm that it participates and can assess your healthylifeessex.co.uk symptoms. If you have red-flag symptoms, do not spend time comparing services: contact your GP urgently, call NHS 111, or use emergency services according to how unwell you are.

Quick guide: pharmacy, GP, NHS 111 or 999?

Situation	A sensible next step
Mild lower UTI symptoms and you may meet the service criteria	Contact a participating Pharmacy First pharmacy for an assessment.
You are pregnant, male, under 16, 65 or over, or have a complex health history	Contact your GP practice or NHS 111 for advice on the right assessment.
Fever, shivering, back or side pain, vomiting, visible blood, or worsening symptoms	Seek prompt medical advice from your GP or NHS 111.
You feel seriously ill, confused, very drowsy or rapidly deteriorate	Call 999 or go to A&E.

The bottom line

For some eligible people in England, UTI Pharmacy First offers a quicker route to an assessment and, where appropriate, treatment for an uncomplicated infection. A pharmacist can also recognise when symptoms need a GP or more urgent care. Fever, pain in your back or side, vomiting, visible blood in your urine or feeling seriously unwell are reasons to seek medical advice promptly rather than relying on a routine pharmacy consultation.

If you are uncertain, ask. Give the pharmacist the full picture, including your age, pregnancy status, medical conditions, medicines and any red-flag symptoms. The safest route is the one that gets you the right assessment for your circumstances.