

Healthcare in prison: what to expect

Information for the public

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This information explains the care that NICE (the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence) has said works best for people when they go into prison. It will help you know what to expect from prison health services. Your family and carers may also find it useful. It was written with the advice of people who have been in prison, their families and carers, and health professionals working in prisons.

Let a member of the healthcare team know if you have problems understanding the information here, or need it in a different format.

While you are in prison you will be able to see a doctor or someone else in the healthcare team if you need to. You should be offered the same NHS health checks as you would if you were living in the community.

Coming into prison

A member of the prison healthcare team will ask about your health and lifestyle to see if you will need any extra care or support. They should ask if English is your first language and check if you will need any help to communicate. They should ask about:

- disabilities (and whether you need to use any special equipment)
- medicines (what you take, when and how you take it)

- recent illness or injuries
- alcohol and drugs
- your mental health.

Women should be offered a pregnancy test if there's a chance they could be pregnant.

If you have mental health problems staff should talk to you about any risks and how to make sure you and other people stay safe.

If you need any tests or treatment or they should refer you to a doctor or other relevant staff working in the prison. You will be asked if it is OK for staff to get your health records from your usual GP.

You may also have a chest X-ray to check for TB.

While you are in prison

In your first week, a health worker will give you a health check up. They should check your height, weight and blood pressure. They might do a urine test to check for other health problems, like diabetes.

They should:

- arrange any medical appointments you need
- explain how to contact staff in the healthcare team
- give you information on staying healthy while you're in prison
- help you make a plan for your care, including ways to cope with any mental health problems.

If you have mental health problems you may be referred for group therapy sessions in prison. If you have used drugs and or alcohol for a while you may be referred for some extra treatment and support.

If you have an ongoing illness, like diabetes or asthma, the healthcare team should check your health regularly.

Taking medicines in prison

If you need to take medicine you might be allowed to keep it with you and take it yourself. If not, a member of the healthcare team will supervise you taking it. They will help you to take it the right way and at the right time.

Leaving prison

At least a month before you leave, someone in the healthcare team should:

- talk to you about planning your care and support after you leave
- help you register with a GP outside prison.

The prison healthcare team should work with other services like social care, community mental health, probation services or drugs and alcohol workers, to make sure you get the right support when you leave.

Taking medicines after you leave prison

The prison healthcare team should make sure you can keep taking the medicine you need, even if you are released or transferred at short notice.

They should make sure you have at least 7 days' worth of medicine when you leave, or a type of prescription called an 'FP10' that helps you get your medicine quickly. They should also give you information about taking your medicine the right way.

Making decisions together

The healthcare team should talk to you about your care, and involve you in decisions. They should talk to you so they understand what matters to you, and give you all the information you need.

Questions you could ask about your care

- I had a hospital appointment booked when I came into prison – will I still be able to go?
- Can I keep my medicines with me, and take them myself while I'm in prison?

- What happens about my medicines if I'm released or transferred? What if this happens at short notice?
- How can I see a doctor or nurse while I'm in prison?
- How can I stay healthy and keep fit while I'm in prison?
- Can you help me stop smoking?

Where can I find out more?

Nacro, 0300 123 1999

www.nacro.org.uk

Positively, UK 0207 713 0444

positivelyuk.org

Prison Reform Trust, 0808 802 0060

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk

Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust, 0203 752 5560

www.rapt.org.uk

Rethink Mental Illness, 0300 5000 927

www.rethink.org

Samaritans, 116 123

www.samaritans.org

Women in Prison, 0207 359 6674

www.womeninprison.org.uk

The [NHS Choices](#) website also has a lot of information about specific health problems and how to stay as healthy as possible.

If you would like more information from any of these organisations you could ask a member of the healthcare team, or a friend or relative, to print it out for you.

NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

You may also like to read NICE's information for the public on [patient experience in adult NHS services](#). This sets out what adults should be able to expect when they use the NHS.

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Accreditation

