

Eligibility Criteria for Patient Transport Services (PTS)

What is PTS?

Non-emergency patient transport services, known as PTS, are typified by the non-urgent, planned, transportation of patients with a medical need for transport to and from a premises providing NHS healthcare and between NHS healthcare providers. This can and should encompass a wide range of vehicle types and levels of care consistent with the patients' medical needs.

Who is eligible for PTS?

PTS should be seen as part of an integrated programme of care. A non-emergency patient is one who, whilst requiring treatment, which may or may not be of a specialist nature, does not require an immediate or urgent response.

Eligible patients should reach healthcare (treatment, outpatient, appointment of diagnostic services i.e. procedures that were traditionally provided in hospital, but are now available in a hospital or community setting), in secondary and primary care settings in a reasonable time and in reasonable comfort, without detriment to their medical condition. Similarly, patients should be able to travel home in reasonable comfort without detriment to their medical condition. The distance to be travelled and frequency of travel should also be taken into account, as the medical need for PTS may be affected by these factors. Similarly, what is a 'reasonable' journey time will need to be defined locally, as circumstances may vary.

Eligible patients are those:

- Where the medical condition of the patient is such that they require the skills or support of PTS staff on/after the journey and/or where it would be detrimental to the patient's condition or recovery if they were to travel by other means.
- Where the patient's medical condition impacts on their mobility to such an extent that they would be unable to access healthcare and/or it would be detrimental to the patient's condition or recovery to travel by other means.
- Recognised as a parent or guardian where children are being conveyed.

PTS could also be provided to a patient's escort or carer where their particular skills and/or support are needed e.g. this might be appropriate for those accompanying a person with a physical or mental incapacity, vulnerable adults or to act as a translator. Discretionary provision such as this would need to be agreed in advance, when transport is booked.

A patient's eligibility for PTS should be determined either by a healthcare professional or by non-clinically qualified staff who are both:

- Clinically supervised and/or working within locally agreed protocols or guidelines, and
- Employed by the NHS or working under contract for the NHS

Escorts

PTS could also be provided to a patient's escort or carer where their particular skills and/or support are needed e.g. this might be appropriate for those accompanying a person with physical or mental incapacity, children or to act as a translator. Only one escort should travel with a patient under such circumstances. Such discretionary provision would need to be agreed in advance, when transport is booked.

The eligibility criteria for PTS have not been extended to include visitors.

Where, exceptionally, a friend or relative accompanies a patient to hospital or for treatment, return transport provision is at the discretion of the provider.

Hospital Travel Cost Scheme (HTCS)

The Hospital Travel Costs Scheme provides financial assistance to those patients who do not have medical need for ambulance transport, but require assistance in meeting the cost of travel to and from their care. Reimbursement of travel fares are provided for services that must be:

- Currently under the care of a consultant (such as a surgeon or rheumatologist, but not a GP)
- For a traditional hospital diagnostic or treatment (i.e. non-primary medical services or non-primary dental services), regardless of where the treatment is carried out
- Paid for by the NHS, regardless of whether it is carried out by an NHS care professional or an independent one

Benefits and allowances that entitle patients (and their dependents) to full or partial reimbursement of travel expenses under HTCS are means-tested and include Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, Child's Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit with Child's Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit with a disability element, or the NHS Low Income Scheme.

PCTs are ultimately responsible for payment of the scheme. However, in practice and for convenience, patients claim their expenses from the NHS trust where they can receive their treatment, and that trust reclaims the expenses from the responsible PCT. Guidance on the operation of the scheme is available from the Department of Health's website.

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assessRoot/04/12/77/39/04127739.pdf>

The full Eligibility Criteria for Patient Transport Services (PTS) can be found on the Department of Health's website:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/publications>