

Sending Pharmacy First Referrals using NHSmail

Following the announcement by the ICB that funding of PharmRefer licences will be discontinued from 31st March 2025, Community Pharmacy West Yorkshire has created the following FAQ advice to practices regarding the use of NHSmail to send Pharmacy First Referrals to community pharmacies. While we look forward to integrated referral processes becoming available for both SystmOne and EMIS GP IT systems, we encourage practices to have in place an alternative interim process.

For help and advice on this and any other aspect of Pharmacy First, please contact Phil Wiles using email phil@cpwy.org.

Sending Pharmacy First Referrals – FAQs

Q. How can I send a Pharmacy First referral?

Pharmacy First referrals can be sent via an approved IT system (such as PharmRefer) or via NHSmail. ICB funding for the PharmRefer licence will cease at the end of March, which will only leave practices with the option of sending referrals via NHSmail, unless they choose to pay for the PharmRefer licence themselves.

Q. Are there any other options available to send referrals?

SystmOne is currently developing an integrated referral process, and we expect that to be available in the very near future. Once they have completed testing and the integrated referral is live, this will become an approved IT system. This approved IT system will use the NHS Booking and Referral System (BaRS) process to send the referrals and they will be sent directly to the pharmacy's chosen Pharmacy First IT platform.

Q. What are the benefits of using an integrated IT system to send referrals?

Pharmacies will receive the referrals directly into their chosen IT platform. This will alert them that a referral has been received – referrals sent to NHSmail will not trigger an alert message and will rely on the pharmacy checking their inbox on a regular basis. Patient details will be automatically populated on the pharmacy IT platform, reducing the risk of transposing errors.

Q. We are an EMIS practice – will we still have access to EMIS Local Services?

Currently the EMIS Local Services option utilises PharmRefer to send referrals to the community pharmacy and for which an additional charge is paid by the ICB. Similarly to SystmOne practices, the contract will not be renewed by the ICB after 31st March. However, EMIS have indicated that they will be changing their contract model making the Local Services referral option, free to use. We are awaiting confirmation that this change will be implemented by 1st April and until confirmed, we advise practices to prepare an interim NHSmail option.

Q. Do we have to change how we send referrals straight away?

Yes, please take action in changing the way you send referrals from 31st March.

Q. If we do not have access to an integrated IT system after 31st March, how can we send referrals?

Referrals can be sent via NHSmail. There are a number of templates available to do this. SystmOne has a [Pharmacy First section](#) which can be found by searching the word 'pharmacy' in the search box, bottom left of the screen. We have not seen how the new referral process will work, but it might be a good idea to start using this template in case some of the functionality remains the same?

Please note that this [video](#) (and the template) advises signposting patients with clinical pathway conditions but we would strongly recommend sending an electronic referral as the patient may not pass the Gateway Criteria for a clinical pathway, and an electronic referral passes on clinical responsibility for that patient to the pharmacy.

[Accumail](#) is a feature in Accurx that allows users to message other healthcare professionals. These messages are sent from the Accurx toolbar, and all correspondence is saved to the patient record. Written guidance can be found [here](#).

[Ardens](#) has a template that can be used, if you have access to this platform.

Q. I need the pharmacy NHSmail address to send the email – how can I find that?

All pharmacy email addresses use the same format:

pharmacy.F-code@nhs.net e.g. pharmacy.f1234@nhs.net

Most referral templates allow you to set up an address book of local contacts so it would be a good idea to add the ones you are most likely to be referring to in advance.

If you don't know a pharmacy's NHSmail address, you can find it using [NHS Service Finder](#) under the Health and Social Care section.

Click on the link under 'Non-Public Email'.

Q. What information do I need to include in an email referral?

You will need to include:

- *Patient's name and address*
- *Patient's NHS number*
- *Patient's Date of Birth*
- *Patient's contact telephone number*
- *Surgery details*
- *Brief details of what condition the patient is being referred for*