Community pharmacies do much more than dispense prescriptions. They can offer advice on everyday health concerns, provide NHS Pharmacy First services and, depending on the pharmacy, deliver vaccinations and travel-health support. Most visits go smoothly, but if something has gone wrong, you are entitled to raise it.

The right route depends on what happened. A concern about how you were treated is usually best raised with the pharmacy first. A serious concern about a pharmacist's professional conduct may need to go to the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). If your complaint is about an NHS-funded service in England, NHS England guidance can help you find the relevant local NHS complaints route.

This guide explains the pharmacy complaints process, how to report pharmacy concerns and what GPhC standards complaints are for. It also covers what to do if your concern involves NHS Pharmacy First, a vaccination or travel-health service.

First, decide what you want to happen

Before making a complaint, write down what happened and what would put things right for you. You might want an explanation, an apology, a review of a decision, a correction to a record or reassurance that the pharmacy will change its procedures. If you are worried about immediate harm, make that clear at the start.

Try to note:

- the date, approximate time and pharmacy location;
- what happened, including the service or medicine involved;
- who you spoke to, if you know their name or role;
- any messages, receipts, appointment details or other relevant evidence;
- how the incident affected you and what outcome you are seeking.

Keep your account factual and avoid sending unnecessary medical details. If you are complaining on behalf of another adult, the pharmacy or NHS body may need their consent before it can discuss confidential information with you.

Start with the pharmacy

For many problems, the simplest first step is to contact the pharmacy where the issue occurred. Ask to speak to the pharmacist in charge, the branch manager or the pharmacy's complaints lead. If the pharmacy is part of a chain, you can also use its central customer-care or complaints team. For an independent pharmacy, the owner or superintendent pharmacist may handle formal complaints.

Explain that you want to make a complaint and say whether you would prefer to talk, write or use an online form. A conversation can resolve a misunderstanding quickly, but a written complaint gives you and the pharmacy a clear record. If you complain in person or by phone, make a note of the date, who you spoke to and what they agreed to do.

Ask when you can expect an acknowledgement and a full response. The pharmacy should explain its complaints arrangements and handle your concern fairly. It may need to look into staff accounts, records or procedures before replying, so a proper investigation can take time. If you do not hear back within the timeframe it gave you, follow up in writing.

What if the problem involved an NHS service?

Community pharmacies provide some services commissioned by the NHS as well as services people pay for privately. If your complaint is about an NHS-funded service in England, you can raise it with the pharmacy or seek advice from the relevant NHS complaints body. NHS England is a useful reference point for understanding the process, but responsibility for primary-care complaints may sit with your local integrated care board (ICB). Check current NHS England guidance or contact the ICB to confirm the correct route for your concern.

In general, NHS complaints can be made to the organisation that provided the care or the organisation that commissioned it. You normally choose one route to start with rather than making parallel complaints. NHS complaints guidance usually asks people to complain within 12 months of the event, or of becoming aware of the issue; there can be exceptions, for example if there was a good reason for the delay and it remains possible to investigate.

When you first contact the NHS body, explain what happened, what you would like investigated and what outcome you are seeking. It should discuss how your complaint will be handled and when you can expect a response. If the response does not address your concerns, ask the organisation to explain what further steps are available. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman may be able to consider an unresolved complaint about NHS care after the organisation's process has been completed.

When should I contact the GPhC?

The GPhC regulates pharmacists and pharmacies in Great Britain. Its standards set expectations for safe, effective and person-centred pharmacy care. If you are searching for "gphc standards complaints", it is important to know that the GPhC is not usually the first stop for every disagreement, and it does not act like a customer-service team that can arrange a refund or compensation.

Contacting the pharmacy first is usually appropriate for concerns such as poor communication, a delay, a booking problem or an unsatisfactory explanation. You can report pharmacy concerns to the GPhC when you believe there may be a serious risk to patient safety or a significant problem with a pharmacist's or pharmacy's professional practice. Examples might include repeated unsafe practice, serious failures involving medicines, dishonesty or behaviour that could put patients at risk.

The regulator assesses the information it receives and decides whether it needs to take action. It may not investigate every complaint, and it generally cannot resolve the personal impact of an individual service problem. You can still make a complaint to the pharmacy or NHS body about your own experience while considering whether the matter also needs to be referred to the regulator.

Pharmacy services that can be worth complaining about

NHS Pharmacy First and faster access

NHS Pharmacy First gives eligible people in England access to advice and, for certain conditions, treatment through a participating community pharmacy. It can offer a faster alternative to waiting for a GP appointment when the problem is suitable for pharmacy care. The service covers seven *healthylifeessex.co.uk* common conditions: sinusitis, sore throat, earache, infected insect bites, impetigo, shingles and uncomplicated urinary tract infections in eligible women.

The pharmacist will assess whether Pharmacy First is appropriate, ask questions and may refer you to another service if your symptoms need a different level of care. Eligibility rules and clinical pathways apply, and not every

pharmacy offers every service at every moment. A referral or a decision not to supply treatment is not automatically evidence of poor care. If you think the assessment was rushed, you were not given a clear explanation, or a safety concern was missed, describe those specific details in your complaint.

Advice and treatment for common conditions

Pharmacies are often an accessible place to ask about minor illnesses, medicines and self-care. Depending on the service and the pharmacy, staff may advise on issues such as coughs and colds, hay fever, minor skin problems, pain relief or digestive symptoms. They can also explain when symptoms need medical assessment. A pharmacy cannot diagnose or treat every condition, so a referral to a GP, NHS 111 or urgent care may be the appropriate outcome.

If you feel your concern was dismissed, explain what you told staff, what advice you received and why you think it was inadequate. If your symptoms have worsened or you need urgent help, seek medical care rather than waiting for the complaint to be answered.

Vaccinations and travel health

Some pharmacies provide NHS flu vaccinations, while others offer private flu vaccinations or other immunisations. Availability, eligibility and the range of vaccines vary. Pharmacies may also offer travel vaccinations and travel health consultations with risk assessment, helping you consider health risks linked to your destination, itinerary and medical history.

For a vaccination concern, record the vaccine involved, the date, any information you were given and what happened afterwards. Seek medical advice promptly if you think you are having a serious reaction. A complaint can address issues such as consent, communication, appointment handling, record-keeping or how a reaction was managed. Do not assume that every vaccine or travel-health service is NHS-funded; confirm this with the pharmacy.

Be clear about charges and prices

No prices were stated in the scraped content. That does not mean a service is free, nor does it confirm what a pharmacy charges. Prices can vary between providers and may depend on the vaccine, consultation or service. Before booking, ask the pharmacy to confirm the current price, what it includes, whether there may be additional charges and its cancellation or refund terms. If you are raising a complaint about a charge, include what you were told before booking and any receipt or written price information you have.

Concern Possible first step What to include Staff interaction or poor communication Contact the pharmacy manager or complaints lead Date, what was said and the outcome you want NHS Pharmacy First or another NHS service Contact the pharmacy; check NHS England or your ICB for the NHS route Service, assessment or referral details and your specific concern Possible serious risk to patient safety Raise it with the pharmacy and consider contacting the GPhC Factual account, relevant records and why you believe there is a safety risk Private vaccination or travel-health charge Ask the pharmacy for its complaints process Price quoted, amount charged, receipt and any booking terms

How to write a useful complaint

A concise, organised complaint is easier to investigate. You do not need legal language. Set out the facts in date order, identify what you believe went wrong and explain how you would like the organisation to respond. If you have several concerns, number them so each can be answered.

1. Address it to the person or team responsible for complaints.
2. Give the date and location, and identify the service involved.
3. Describe what happened as clearly and objectively as you can.
4. Explain the impact on you or the person you are supporting.
5. State what you want the organisation to do, such as explain, apologise or review a process.
6. Attach copies of relevant evidence, keeping the originals.
7. Ask for confirmation that the complaint has been received and an expected response date.

If you need help communicating, ask whether the pharmacy or NHS complaints team can offer support, an interpreter, an accessible format or an advocate. Keep copies of everything you send and receive.



If you are unhappy with the response

Read the response carefully and identify what remains unanswered. You can go back to the pharmacy or NHS body with specific questions and explain why you do not consider the matter resolved. Ask what review or escalation route is available. For NHS complaints in England, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman may be the next step once the organisation has had the opportunity to respond. For serious professional-conduct or safety concerns, you can also check whether the GPhC is the appropriate regulator.



Different routes have different powers. A pharmacy can investigate its service and explain what it will change; an NHS complaints body can look at the handling of NHS care; and the GPhC considers regulatory concerns. Choosing the route that matches the issue can help your concern reach the right people.

In summary

If you want to complain about a pharmacy service, write down what happened, contact the pharmacy's complaints lead and be clear about the outcome you are seeking. For an NHS-funded service in England, use NHS England information to identify the relevant local complaints route, which may be your ICB. For serious concerns about professional practice or patient safety, consider reporting them to the GPhC as well. Whether the issue involves dispensing, NHS Pharmacy First, common-condition advice, flu vaccinations or travel health, you have the right to raise a concern and ask for it to be taken seriously.