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# 1 Healthcare

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## 1.1 Registration in the National Health Service (NHS)

The National Health Care System (SSN) is a collection of structures and services that ensure health protection and health care assistance for all Italian and foreign citizens.

Foreign citizens residing in Italy, with a legal Permit to Stay, have the right to the healthcare as provided by the National Health Service, with equal treatment compared to Italian citizens. Healthcare involves – besides those registered in it – also dependent family members regularly staying in Italy.

### 227. Where is registration made?

Registration is made at the Local Health Unit (LHU) of the area of residence or – in case of lack of residence – the domicile.

### 228. What is the Local Healthcare Unit (LHU)?

It is a set of hospitals, surgeries and offices that provide for the health of territorial population. Within LHUs it is possible to register in the NHS and select one's general practitioner.

### 229. Can I register in the National Health Service (NHS)?

The registration in the National Health Service is compulsory for foreign citizens owning:

- an EC long-term residence permit;
- a residence permit for employed work;
- a residence permit for self-employed work;
- a residence permit for pending employment;
- a residence permit for family reasons;
- a residence permit for political asylum;
- a residence permit for humanitarian reasons;
- a residence permit for pending adoption;
- a residence permit for foster care;
- a residence permit for reasons linked to the acquisition of citizenship.

Foreigners awaiting for the renewal or the issuance of a residence permit do not lose their right to healthcare, and if not yet registered they can be enrolled.

Family members who are dependent are also entitled to healthcare.

Additional information is available in the State-Regions Agreement containing “indications for the correct enforcement of the regulation for healthcare to foreign nationals by autonomous Regions and Provinces”.

**Attention:** foreign citizens who enter Italy for medical treatment can not enrol in the SSN and they are personally responsible for payment of all bills related to the treatments carried out; Foreigners who are political refugees and stateless people and their spouses can register in the SSN under the same conditions as Italian citizens, provided they have a valid residence permit. Minor children of foreign nationals registered in the NHS are granted since their birth the same care as Italian registered minors. Foreign nationals with a permit for study or religious reasons, and au pair foreigners **may** perform a voluntary registration in the NHS for themselves and their family members, or they may sign an insurance policy against the risk of diseases, injuries, and maternity leave.

### **230. When is enrolment in the National Health Service not allowed?**

It is not possible to register in case of foreign nationals staying in the national territory for less than three months (tourism, visit, business visa, etc.) or in case of foreign nationals illegally present in Italy.

### **231. Which documents do I have to submit to register in the National Health Service?**

In general, the documents to be submitted are the following:

- A valid residence permit; if the residence permit is being renewed, it is possible to file the expired permit together with the receipt of the application for renewal (issued by the Police Headquarters or by the Post Office).
- A residence and marital status statement;
- Tax code;
- Statement with which undertaking to notify any changes to one's status.

Furthermore, specific documents may be requested, which vary according to the type of permit owned. A detailed list of documents requested is available in the State-Regions Agreement containing "indications for the correct enforcement of the regulation for healthcare to foreign nationals by autonomous Regions and Provinces".

### **232. How long does registration in the National Health Service last?**

The registration in the NHS has the same duration as the residence permit.

### **233. When does the registration in the National Health Service ends?**

It ends:

- if the residence permit expires, unless producing an application for renewal or the renewed permit;
- if the Permit to Stay is revoked or annulled, unless it can be demonstrated that an appeal is in process;
- in case of expulsion;
- when the conditions allowing the foreigner to belong to the category of people obligatorily enrolled in the NHS cease to exist (for instance: the conversion of the residence permit in a different type of permit for which the obligatory enrolment in the NHS is not foreseen; the conclusion of the employment activity or the end of a foreigner's enrolment in the Employment Offices if the foreigner does not have the type of Permit to Stay that makes enrolment in the NHS compulsory).

### **234. What documents and social-health services do people enrolled in the National Health Service have access to?**

- The health care card;
- the selection of a family doctor and a paediatrician for one's children;
- general checkups at the surgery and specialist examinations;
- medical visits at home;
- hospitalisations;
- vaccinations;
- blood tests, x-rays, ultrasound scans, etc.;
- prescription of medicines;
- certificates and legal-medical services;
- assistance in case of rehabilitation, prosthesis, etc.

**Attention:** There are services provided also to those not registered in the NHS. They include: outpatient and hospital urgent or essential care, in case of disease or injury, and the programs of preventive medicine for the protection of individual and collective health are extended.

In particular, the following healthcare is guaranteed:

- pregnancy and maternity care;
- care of minors;
- vaccines;
- international prophylaxis services;
- prophylaxis, diagnosis and care of infectious diseases;
- care, prevention and rehabilitation in case of drug addiction.

## 1.2 The Healthcare Card

### 235. What is the healthcare card?

It is the document issued by the LHU that demonstrates that you are registered in the NHS. It is essential in order to access the available health services. The healthcare card contains:

- The personal data of the patient and the Tax code;
- The expiry date for the health services only;
- A free area for eventual regional health data, plus three Braille characters for visually impaired people;
- The Tax Code in a barcode format and a magnetic stripe.

### 236. What to do in case of loss of the Healthcare Card?

You must go to the competent local authorities, report the loss and then request a duplicate from the LHU to which you belong.

## 1.3 The Services provided by the National Health Service

### 237. Who is the general practitioner (or family doctor)?

Your general practitioner is the professional who ensures that you receive general medical care:

- she/he examines patients in her/his own office or at the homes of those who are sick when the health conditions do not permit the patient to go to the physician's office;
- she/he prescribes medicines, analyses and refers to specialists;
- she/he proposes hospitalization if necessary;
- she/he issues certificates

### 238. Who is the family paediatrician?

She/he is the physician that looks after children, periodically gives them physical examinations, checks their growth, prescribes medicines, analyses and exams with specialists, she/he also recommends hospitalization if necessary, and issues certificates.

### 239. How do I choose a family physician and paediatrician?

The person enrolled in the NHS can choose the family physician and the family paediatrician for their children aged between 0 and 14 and are entitled to have a paediatrician.

The office that issues the health card displays a list with the doctors available. The name of the family doctor is written in one's personal health records document.

### 240. Are the certificates issued by the family physician and paediatrician free?

The following certificates are free of charge:

- the certificate allowing a parent to be absent from their job when their child is ill;
- the certificate for carrying out non-competitive sports activities in connection with school;
- the certificate of illness or injury or other motives for temporary inability to work.

The following certificates are not free:

- a certificate for competitive sports activities;
- a certificate for insurance purposes;
- a certificate for applying to have one's disability recognised.

#### **241. Can I revoke or replace my family doctor at any moment?**

Yes, by filling out a special form; at the same time you also have to choose a new doctor.

#### **242. How does one have an examination with a specialist?**

In order to have a visit with a specialist, it is necessary to obtain a request for the specialist from the family physician. With the family doctor's request and your healthcare card, you shall go to the reservation office of the LHU to book your appointment with a specialist. Some LHUs are endowed with a telephone reservation system. These services may also be carried out at private laboratories having agreements with the NHS.

#### **243. Are the medical examinations with specialists free?**

For medical examinations with specialists, laboratory examinations and the purchase of medicines it is necessary to pay a fee that is pre-established by the Government, the *ticket*.

The following are exempted from the payment of *tickets* on medicines:

- disabled with a total disability, disabled with a disability exceeding two thirds, or who receive government assistance in order to pay for nursing or other help due to their disability, the blind and the deaf;
- the victims of terrorism and of the organised crime;
- patients undergoing painful therapies;
- beneficiaries of non-contributory pensions;
- beneficiaries of minimum pensions aged over 60.

In case of specialist care, the following are exempted from the payment of the *ticket*:

- beneficiaries of non-contributory pensions and dependent family members;
- the unemployed and the beneficiaries of minimum pensions aged over 60;
- civil disabled with a disability exceeding two thirds or who receive government assistance in order to pay for nursing or other help due to a disability;
- those who underwent accidents at the workplace and all the categories of citizens exempted due to pathologies or conditions identified by special laws.

For some medical services it is not necessary to pay the ticket, even if the citizen is not part of any of the categories listed above. These services are:

- exams for the early diagnosis of the tumours (mammography, pap tests, etc.);
- services aimed at protecting maternity, for example, analysis, ultrasound scans, etc.;
- services for promoting blood, organ and tissue donations, and non-obligatory vaccinations for children under 14 years.

#### **244. How do I obtain exemption from paying the *ticket*?**

By submitting your application to the LHU, equipped with a certificate from a medical expert or hospital physician, your health care card, and your tax code. The LHU then issues a card that permits multiple prescriptions for up to a maximum of 6 units of the medicine required for the pathology. The duration of the exemption may be either permanent or limited, according to the types of diseases and/or the regional regulations in force. Eventual expiration of exemptions are indicated on the relevant certificates.

**Attention:** regulations about exemptions are sometimes emended. For information about the current set of norms about exemption and about the documents to be submitted, you can ask your family physician and family paediatrician.

**245. What are the emergency services?**

In cases of urgency (accidents, injuries and any life-threatening situation) you may reach the Emergency Unit of a hospital or request medical services by dialling the free telephone service, “118”, available 24H.

**246. Is hospital care free of charge?**

Hospital care is free for all people registered in the National Health Service.

The budget law 2006 introduced as from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007 the payment of a *ticket* on all emergency unit interventions not classified as urgent (“white code”).

**247. What is the “doctor on duty”?**

It is a totally free service that can be called at any time in the case of serious need; it offers immediate medical assistance at your home. Citizens residing in other regions shall, on the contrary, pay the fee charged for occasional visits.

**248. Is nursing assistance included in the National Health Service?**

Currently this type of assistance is not covered by the National Health Care System. If necessary, however, it can be offered, at home, if the social services of the Municipality report it to the health authorities.

**249. Can health examinations and treatments be imposed?**

No, apart from the cases provided for by the Law (Compulsory Health Treatments) always respecting human dignity and civil rights. These interventions are arranged if the Mayor issues a measure, following the proposal made by a physician, to be corroborated by a physician from the responsible health structure. 48 hours following hospital admission, the initiative must have been communicated to the responsible tutelary Judge.

**250. Can anyone oppose a compulsory health treatment?**

The person who is submitted to the treatment, or who is involved in the situation, may lodge an appeal against the forced measure (supported by the tutelary Judge).

**251. What happens if the hospitalized citizen is a foreign national or stateless person?**

The hospitalisation measure must be communicated to the Ministry of the Interior and to the Consulate of the Country of origin of the individual. The notification occurs through the Prefect.

**252. What are the family planning clinics?**

They are local social-health services that protect the physical and psychological health of women, children, couples and families. All the services offered by the family planning clinics are free and may be accessed by appointment. The service is also available to foreigners.

The professionals operating in family planning clinics have both psychological and social skills: psychologists, social assistants, sociologists, cultural mediators, as well as health skills: paediatricians, gynaecologists, midwives, nurses, health assistants, etc.

Family planning clinics may be accessed for the following services:

- consulting and visits on contraception;
- assistance during pregnancy;
- pre-delivery courses;
- consultations, visits and certificates for voluntary abortion;
- periodical gynaecological checkups;
- prevention of women cancers;

- aid and assistance during menopause;
- paediatric assistance;
- compulsory (and recommended) vaccinations;
- support for social and psychological problems.

**253. Where finding the addresses of family planning clinics?**

In telephone directories, under «Aziende sanitarie locali» as to public clinics and under «Consultori» for non public ones, or in institutional and non-specialist websites

**254. Are there any other local social sanitary services I can access?**

Yes, the Territorial Rehabilitation Units, and the Mental Health Centres.

**255. When and which vaccinations are compulsory?**

Compulsory vaccinations vary from region to region. In general, for children in Italy the vaccinations against tetanus, diphtheria, poliomyelitis and hepatitis B are compulsory. Vaccinations against chickenpox, pertussis (whooping cough) and, only for children, against German measles are recommended but not compulsory. For adults the vaccinations against tetanus and viral hepatitis B are recommended.

**256. Are compulsory vaccinations free of charge?**

Yes.

**257. Under which circumstances can one be asked to present a certificate of vaccinations?**

- When enrolling to primary school;
- When enrolling to nursery school,
- When enrolling to kindergarten,
- When registering in summer camps to perform competitive sports activities.

**258. Who can voluntarily register in the National Health Service?**

Foreign citizens, for whom enrolment in the SSN is not compulsory, must nonetheless insure themselves against the risk of illnesses, accidents and maternity. They can meet this requirement by:

- Signing an insurance policy with an Italian or foreign insurance institute, valid in the national territory;
- Voluntarily registering in the NHS upon the payment of an annual fee where provided for.

The following have the right to voluntary enrolment in the Health Care System (paying an annual fee):

- students;
- people au pair under the European Strasbourg Agreement of 24<sup>th</sup> November 1969 (as ratified with Law no. 304 of 18<sup>th</sup> May 1973);
- religious people;
- people with permits to stay for elective residence who do not carry out any work activity;
- foreign nationals accredited in Italy that work in Embassies;
- other categories that may be identified by exclusion among those who are not entitled to compulsory registration.

**259. Which documents are necessary to voluntarily register in the National Health Service?**

- A valid residence permit; if the residence permit is under renewal, it is possible to submit the expired permit along with the receipt for the application for renewal (issued by the Police Headquarters or by the Post Office).
- A certificate of residence and eventual family status;
- Tax Code;
- Receipt of the payslip.

Additional certificates shall be produced by:

- students (self-certification of enrolment in the educational course);
- foreigners working as au pairs.

### **260. Do I have any rights failing a valid residence permit?**

Foreign citizens who are not in keeping with the norms related to entry and/or to the stay in Italy because they do not have a Permit to Stay or they have a Permit to Stay that has expired for more than 60 days, are guaranteed urgent and essential out-patient and hospital care for illness and injuries and preventive medicine interventions to safeguard individual and collective health, at public and accredited structures. Among the preventive medicine interventions are the following:

- interventions for the social protection of pregnancy and motherhood;
- vaccinations;
- international prophylaxis services;
- prophylaxis, diagnosis and care of infectious diseases;
- activities aimed to the protection of mental health.

## **1.4 Temporary Present Foreigners**

Foreign citizens who are illegally present in Italy are assigned an identification code, called the “STP” (Temporarily Present Foreigner), which is valid for 6 months and is renewable.

The access to health facilities by irregular foreign nationals in Italy does not entail the reporting to the police authorities, unless the reporting is compulsory by law.

### **261. Can I access health services if I do not have the money to pay the *ticket*?**

If foreign citizens do not have enough money, they will only pay a part of the ticket (a share of the fee).

Foreign citizens with no money at all (situations of poverty) can be exempt from paying the share of the expenses for the ticket, if she/he signs a “declaration of indigence”, which is valid for 6 months.

### **262. Which services am I entitled to, although I have no money to pay the *ticket*?**

can be exempt from paying the share of the expenses for the ticket, if she/he signs a “declaration of indigence”, which is valid for 6 months:

- First level health services;
- urgency;
- pregnancy;
- exempted diseases;
- age or disabling conditions.