

Factsheet: Understanding Prescription Returns

This factsheet, prepared by PSNC’s Dispensing and Supply Team, describes the process by which prescriptions are returned or ‘referred back’ to pharmacies for further information to assist with pricing.



What is a referred back or prescription return?

Where the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) cannot process a prescription item for payment due to insufficient endorsed information, it is returned to the pharmacy for the missing information to be added so that it can be correctly reimbursed.

Part II Clause 9F of the Drug Tariff states ‘*where insufficient information is available to enable the Pricing Authority to process the prescription, including where it was submitted for a SSP payment, the form (or a copy of the original form) shall be returned to the contractor who shall endorse the prescription form (or copy) with the information requested. Returned prescriptions shall be priced using the Drug Tariff relevant to the month in which the prescription form (or copy) is returned to the Pricing Authority.*’

Why are prescription items referred back?

The NHSBSA apply a coding system to identify up to 19 possible reasons for items being referred back (RB) to the pharmacy for further information. Each returned item is assigned an RB code to indicate the RB reason. A table of RB reason codes and what each code means can be found on the [NHSBSA website](#) or on the [PSNC website](#).

The most common reason why an item is returned is due to an incomplete endorsement, where one or more of the following is missing:

- manufacturer / brand name (if not in Drug Tariff and listed by more than one supplier);
- pack size (if more than one pack size is available); and
- price (if NHSBSA does not hold a price for it).

NOTE: Missing or incorrect patient exempt or paid declarations are not referred back to contractors – if patient declarations are missing this can lead to switching and potentially inappropriate charge deductions.

An item could also be returned if too much information is included in the endorsement, for example more than one manufacturer endorsed.

The NHSBSA Prescription Services helpline can be contacted for further advice if pharmacy staff are unsure as to why an item has been returned or if it is unclear as to what needs to be endorsed. Telephone: 0300 330 1349 or 0191 279 0568; email: nhsbsa.prescriptionservices@nhsbsa.nhs.uk

How many prescription items are referred back each month?

In 2020, over 800,000 items were RB to pharmacy contractors by the NHSBSA for further clarification. This works out to a monthly average of 68,302 items (0.08% of all prescriptions items processed) or ~6 items per pharmacy contractor per month.

Year	Items processed	Total items referred back
2020	1.040bn	820k

How do I know if an item submitted for payment has been referred back to the pharmacy?

At present, most contractors receive their monthly RB items for both EPS and paper prescriptions through the post. Currently, over a third of contractors receive their RB items via the Manage Your Service (MYS) portal.



Digital RBs via Manage Your Service (MYS)

Contractors signed up to MYS can request to view and action their prescription returns digitally from their MYS accounts. Currently, using MYS for receiving RBs is optional, and contractors need to sign up to receive their prescription returns digitally by registering their interest with NHSBSA to have this feature turned on.

Contractors wishing to access their digital RBs and disallowed items should contact the MYS team by emailing nhsbsa.mys@nhs.net to enable access to these features on their MYS portal. Once the MYS prescription returns feature is enabled, paper prescription returns will no longer be posted to the pharmacy.



The advantages of using MYS for RB items are:

- it allows contractors to add information easily;
- contractors receive their RB items sooner;
- provides the relevant information required to process the items faster;
- track the progress of RB items throughout until the point they are processed;
- contractors can manage resubmission claims easily;
- completed RB can be submitted to the NHSBSA at any time;
- minimise any risks of losing paper RB items during transit;
- monthly status reports of refer RB items can be requested from the NHSBSA; and
- reduction in phone calls from NHSBSA to pharmacies to clarify information provided.

When the required additional information has been added to the relevant sections within MYS, contractors can submit RB items electronically to the NHSBSA for re-processing. If the submitted information is still insufficient to allow NHSBSA to process the prescription for payment, the item will be re-sent to the contractor.

It is important to note that prescription returns via MYS are only held in the system for a period of 18 months from the date they are first sent to the pharmacy for action; if contractors have not completed and returned any outstanding RBs before this deadline has passed, the RB items will be deleted from the system.

Paper RBs received via post

Contractors that are not signed up to receive digital RB items via the MYS portal, receive a letter via the post from the NHSBSA with information on any RB items.

For any RB items on paper FP10 prescriptions, an image of the prescription is copied onto an A4 sheet identifying the RB item including any endorsed information and patient details such as name and address. EPS RB items received via the post are a text image of the prescribed and dispensed item and include the patient's NHS number only.

Each RB prescription item returned via post has a specific **RB code** listed underneath the image of the prescription to inform the contractor why the item was returned and to explain what information needs to be completed on the prescription returns form to allow the NHSBSA to process the item for payment.

There is an additional information box at the bottom of the prescription returns form for pharmacy teams to populate the required information for each RB item.

Once the required information has been added for each RB item, the prescription returns form is ready to be submitted to the NHSBSA after the end of the dispensing month.

End of month submission process for completed RB items

During the end of month submission process, the total number of completed RB prescription forms and items being resubmitted should be declared in the relevant boxes in Part 1 of the paper FP34C submission document or by using the digital MYS submission form.

Please note, only the number of items returned for clarification where payment has been delayed should be declared on the FP34C submission document. This is because payment will already have been received for any other items on the returned forms.

Any completed paper RBs should be sorted and placed securely at the top of the appropriate, 'exempt' or 'charge paid' groups.

Q. How are completed RB items processed by the NHSBSA?

Prescription items that are re-submitted for payment are priced using the Drug Tariff relevant to the dispensing month in which the prescription return is received by the NHSBSA. This can lead to a delay in payment and potential cash-flow risks if very expensive items, or many items are RB in a month. The volume of RBs can be greatly reduced by adopting good endorsing practices and thorough end-of-month submission checks.

Q. Where on a paper referred back prescription does it indicate if it has been processed as exempt or chargeable?

Photocopied prescriptions returned to contractors for further information contain a reference code underneath the image of the prescription. This reference code indicates the form type, exemption status (exempt or chargeable) and, where relevant, the patient's exemption group. For example, from the reference code 'FP10D E B' on a returned photocopy, it is possible to tell:

- the prescription form type (FP10 is a dental prescription);
- the exemption status – the 'E' indicates the prescription was considered exempt from the prescription charge (prescriptions that are considered 'Charge Paid' will show the letter 'C'); and
- the patient's exemption group – the 'B' indicates that the patient was exempt because they were 16, 17 or 18 years of age and in full time education (if the NHSBSA has been unable to determine the category, the second letter will be a 'Z').

PSNC Top Tips

- When preparing your prescriptions for end of month submission double-check that all prescriptions have the appropriate endorsements, and that the endorsement is clear. See our [Endorsement guidance](#) page for more information and links to our endorsing factsheet.
- Only include figures for the items requiring additional information on your FP34C all other products on the form have already been processed and reimbursed.