

Keeping healthy

31 March 2011

Introduction

Arriving in a new country is a very busy time and there are a lot of changes to go through. For example, there are differences in food, weather and customs to cope with. In this type of situation, with all its stresses, you can find yourself paying less attention than usual to your health. Existing health problems can also be made worse by the effects of adjusting to unfamiliar food, a different climate and the emotional strains of being away from home. It can be easy to concentrate on your studies and forget about taking care of yourself.

This Information Sheet aims to give advice on looking after yourself, as well as practical information on how to obtain medical treatment. It also explains students' entitlement to free medical treatment under the UK state health system.

For more information about general issues faced upon coming to the UK, see our information sheet on International Students and Culture Shock at www.ukcisa.org.uk/student/info_sheets/culture_shock.php).

The National Health Service

The NHS (National Health Service) is the UK's state health service which provides treatment for UK residents through a wide range of health care services. Some services are free and some have to be paid for.

Am I entitled to NHS treatment?

The following NHS treatment is free for everyone:

- some emergency treatment (but not follow-up treatment)
- family planning services
- diagnosis and treatment of certain communicable diseases
- compulsory psychiatric treatment

To qualify for any other NHS treatment, you must meet certain conditions:

Courses of six months or more in England, Wales or Northern Ireland OR courses of any duration in Scotland

If your course of study is for six months or more and you are studying in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, OR if your course is of any duration and you are studying in Scotland:

- you will qualify for NHS treatment from the beginning of your stay on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK.

- your spouse or children with you in the UK will also be entitled to NHS treatment. To receive free hospital treatment in England, Wales or Northern Ireland, your family members must be in the UK as your dependants and not, for example, as visitors. 'Family' in this situation means your husband or wife, and your children aged up to the age of 16 (or up to the age of 19 if they are in full-time education).

If your course of study is for less than six months and you are studying in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, on a course which is substantially funded by the UK government, you will receive full NHS hospital treatment from the beginning of your stay. 'Substantially' means at least 35% government funded. You will need to provide evidence of the funding in order to qualify for free treatment. However, you might not be eligible for free GP treatment.

If you are in one of the eligible categories described above, you can register as a patient with a local Doctor (also referred to as General Practitioner or GP). GPs are doctors who are trained and experienced in diagnosing a wide range of health problems. The Doctor/GP will be based in a local office (called a Surgery) or in a Health Centre. Some institutions, mainly universities, have a Doctor's Surgery or Health Centre on campus. Check with your institution.

You are also entitled to free treatment in NHS hospitals.

We strongly recommend that you register with a GP within the first couple of weeks of arriving in the UK, even if you do not feel ill. This is to make it easier to see the Doctor when you need to, as GPs are often unable to give appointments to people not registered at their Surgery, except in a real emergency.

To register at the Doctor's Surgery or Health Centre, you will need:

- your passport;
- evidence that you are a student (for example, your enrolment letter or student card); and
- proof of your UK address (for example, accommodation contract or tenancy agreement).

NHS local services

You can use NHS Direct (at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/en/CheckSymptoms/FindYourNearest) to find your nearest:

- doctor's surgery;
- optician (for vision tests, glasses/spectacles, contact lenses etc);
- dentist; and
- pharmacy, also sometimes known as a chemist.

Note: If you have to give up your studies temporarily and you are refused free health treatment, contact your student adviser for information about how you might be able to challenge this.

If you are not in one of the eligible categories described above, and your course is under six months long, you and your family are only entitled to limited free NHS treatment. You will have free emergency hospital treatment, but only the treatment given in a NHS Accident and Emergency department is free of charge. Once you are admitted on to a ward or given an outpatient appointment, charges will apply. GPs may agree to treat you for free, but this will usually be limited to urgent treatment that cannot be delayed until you return home. You will have to pay for any other treatment as a private patient. It is therefore very important that you take out medical insurance for the duration of your visit to the UK. Please note that private medical treatment is very expensive if you do not have private medical insurance.

If you are not entitled to NHS cover, also see the section [Do I need medical insurance?](#)

Reciprocal Health Care Agreements

The UK has reciprocal health care agreements for the following people:

- Nationals of countries in the European Economic Area (see note below)
- Those who are nationals of: Armenia; Azerbaijan; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Moldova; New Zealand; Russia; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; Ukraine; and Uzbekistan.
- Those who are residents of: Anguilla; Australia; Barbados; Bosnia and Herzegovina; British Virgin Islands; Channel Islands; Croatia; Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Isle of Man; Macedonia; Montenegro; Montserrat; Serbia; St Helena; and Turks and Caicos Islands.

Please note that this list changes, as new arrangements are agreed, or existing agreements end.

If you are covered by a reciprocal health care agreement, you will be eligible for some NHS treatment even if your course lasts less than six months. Reciprocal health care agreements generally cover hospital treatment, the need for which arose during your stay, but do not always cover treatment of an existing condition. Before you travel, you should seek advice from the health authorities in your home country about what treatment will be covered. You may still need to take out limited medical insurance.

If you are a Swiss national or a national of one of the member states of the European Union who has come to study in the UK from Switzerland, you will have the same healthcare eligibility as European Economic Area (EEA) nationals (see below). However, this does not apply to you if you are a national of Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein and you have been resident in Switzerland before coming to the UK.

European Economic Area (EEA) nationals

All non-UK European Economic Area (EEA) nationals and their family should obtain a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) before coming to the UK. This card entitles the holder and their family to full NHS treatment on the same basis as the student categories described above.

Visit the Department of Health website for more information on the EHIC at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Healthadvicefortravellers/index.htm.

What does the NHS provide free of charge?

If you are entitled to NHS treatment, the following services will be free of charge:

- consulting a GP and most other GP services (e.g. visiting a clinic)
- treatment in a hospital (both emergency and non-emergency treatment)

You may need to pay for:

- medicines prescribed by your GP
- some GP services (eg vaccinations for travel, getting a sickness certificate) - ask your GP for details of costs
- dental treatment
- optical treatment

For details of NHS charges, see the NHS leaflet HC12 on the Department of Health website at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Medicinespharmacyandindustry/Prescriptions/NHSCosts/index.htm.

Medical treatment

The NHS provides medical treatment through three main routes:

1. GP's (Doctor's) Surgery or Health Centre

This is your first point of contact for medical treatment. As detailed earlier in this Information Sheet, UK residents register with a Health Centre or GP's Surgery. Most illnesses and other problems can be treated by the GP, but if you need to see a specialist, the GP will refer you to an appropriate hospital department (see below). As well as consultations with a Doctor, most GP's Surgeries and Health Centres provide a range of community health services: for example vaccinations, women's health clinics, services for parents of young children, family planning (see below), contraception and sexual health.

GP Surgeries and Health Clinics are normally open during the daytime and early evening. However, they normally have an answering-machine message about where you can get help when the Surgery or Health Centre is closed. Your local hospital may also have an NHS Walk-in Clinic. You can also call NHS Direct.

NHS Direct

If you or your family are feeling ill, NHS Direct can be a helpful source of advice and information.

NHS Direct operates a 24-hour nurse advice and health telephone information service for England and Wales, providing confidential information on:

- what to do if you or your family are feeling ill;
- particular health conditions;
- local healthcare services, such as doctors, dentists or late night opening pharmacies (chemist's);
- self-help and support organisations.

For details of how to contact NHS Direct, see the [address list](#).

2. Hospital

If your GP refers you to hospital for treatment, you will usually be given an appointment to see a consultant (specialist doctor). Depending on the medical problem, you may be treated as an in-patient (where you are admitted to a ward and stay there overnight or longer) or as an out-patient (where you visit the hospital for an appointment).

If you think you need to see a specialist, you should approach your GP first and ask her or him to refer you.

3. Accident and Emergency (A&E) Departments

Some (but not all) hospitals have Accident and Emergency departments. These departments are open 24 hours a day and deal with patients needing emergency treatment.

Dealing with medical emergencies

Emergency services: dial 999

If you need immediate medical assistance (for example, because of an accident), telephone 999. The call is free including from mobile phones. An operator will ask you which emergency service you need (Fire, Police or Ambulance). For urgent medical assistance ask for the ambulance service. Be ready to tell the emergency services what has happened and exactly where you are, especially the street name. Once you are connected to the Emergency Medical Dispatcher, she or he will ask you questions about the condition of the patient and may offer advice on what to do until the ambulance arrives. If the person is badly injured and needs to go to hospital, an ambulance will be dispatched to take the person to a hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.

If you need urgent treatment, but you are well enough to travel, you can also make your own way by bus

or taxi to an Accident and Emergency (A&E) department, or ask a friend to take you.

Note: You should only use A&E Departments for emergency treatment for serious illness or injury.

Do I need medical insurance?

If you are not entitled to free NHS treatment, you should make sure you have adequate medical insurance to cover medical costs if you fall ill, and also to cover the additional possible costs resulting from illness. These can be substantial, and include:

- lost fees if you are unable to complete your course;
- costs of returning home if a relative is ill;
- costs of a relative visiting you in the UK if you fall ill;
- cost of returning to your home country for treatment;
- or in the worst possible situation, returning a body home for burial.

Even if you are entitled to free NHS treatment whilst in the UK, you should consider taking out insurance which covers the above additional costs. Moreover, even if you are covered by the NHS for medical treatment, you may find that there are long waiting times for some services. An insurance policy which gives you access to private medical care could give you much quicker access to the treatment you need.

If you already have medical insurance in your home country, check whether you can extend it to cover your stay in the UK, as well as looking at options available from UK insurers. Endsleigh Insurance have produced a special health insurance policy for international students and their spouses or civil partners and children in the UK. Details of the policy can be found on the Endsleigh website at www.endsleigh.co.uk. Please contact Endsleigh for further details.

How do I register with a general practitioner?

When you arrive at your place of study you should register with a doctor as soon as possible. Do not wait until you are ill. If your institution has its own health centre, you may be able to register there. Otherwise, you should register with any doctor close to where you live. A list of local doctors will be available from the Post Office, or your local authority, or from the NHS (at www.nhs.uk/Pages/homepage.aspx).

To register, you will need to visit the doctor's surgery or clinic during consulting hours, taking a letter from your institution as proof that you are a student. You should ask to be added to the list of NHS patients. Most doctors' surgeries have female as well as male doctors, and if you prefer you can ask to be put on a woman doctor's list. If you only want to be seen by a woman doctor, you may need to say so whenever you make an appointment.

To avoid paying the full (private) cost of treatment make sure the doctor knows you want treatment from the NHS.

If the doctor accepts you as a patient you will be sent a medical card through the post with your NHS number. However, being registered with a GP (doctor), and having an NHS number, does not give you automatic entitlement to free hospital treatment. The hospital providing treatment is responsible for establishing whether international students are **entitled to hospital treatment without charge**.

If the doctor does not accept you as a patient, try elsewhere or contact the local Primary Care Trust (in England or Scotland), the Central Services Agency (in Northern Ireland) or your Local Health Board (in Wales) whose address can be obtained from the post office or doctor or from the NHS (at www.nhs.uk/Pages/homepage.aspx).

Under the NHS, appointments with doctors are free. Ask whether or not you have to make an appointment to see the doctor, and remember to arrive on time for any appointment you make. Normally

a doctor will only agree to visit you at home in emergencies, when whoever is sick is confined to bed and cannot get to the surgery.

Can I get free medicine?

If a doctor recommends a medicine, they may write a prescription for you. The prescription authorises a pharmacist to give you a particular medicine.

Prescriptions and other medicines can be obtained from the pharmacy counter at chemist's shops. Some medicines are only available on prescription. In other cases, the medicine prescribed by the doctor may be available to buy, without a prescription, from the chemist for less than the standard prescription charge, so always check first with the pharmacist.

England

In England, you will be asked to pay a standard prescription charge for each item (£7.20). This cost usually rises by a small amount on 1 April each year. If you are receiving ongoing treatment and need more than 4 items in 3 months, or more than 14 items in 12 months, it may well be cheaper to buy a **Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC)**. These cost £28.25 for a 3-month certificate, and £104.00 for a 12-month certificate. The certificate covers all prescription charges during that period.

You are automatically entitled to free prescriptions if you are under 19 and studying full-time; if you are aged 60 or over; if you are pregnant or have had a baby within the last 12 months and have a valid exemption certificate; or if you have a listed medical condition and an exemption certificate. Your children can get free prescriptions if they are under 16, or under 19 and studying full-time. You may also be able to get free or reduced cost prescriptions on the grounds of low income.

Wales and Northern Ireland

Prescriptions are free to all in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Scotland

In Scotland, you will be asked to pay a standard prescription charge of £3.00 per item - this charge only applies to Scottish prescriptions dispensed in Scotland. English, Welsh or Northern Irish prescriptions, dispensed in Scotland, will still cost £7.20 per item. In Scotland, a Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC) costs £10.00 for a 4-month certificate and £28.00 for a 12-month certificate. A Scottish PPC is valid throughout the UK.

You are automatically entitled to free prescriptions if you are under 19 and studying full-time; if you are aged 60 or over; if you are pregnant or have had a baby within the last 12 months and have a valid exemption certificate; or if you have a listed medical condition and an exemption certificate. Your children can get free prescriptions if they are under 16, or under 19 and studying full-time. You may also be able to get free or reduced cost prescriptions on the grounds of low income.

For further information on these issues, see the section on [Claiming help towards health costs](#).

Dental treatment

You should try to have your teeth checked by a dentist at least once a year.

You can find lists of dentists who give NHS treatment at local main post offices or from www.nhs.uk/Pages/homepage.aspx. You should ask the dentist whether they accept NHS patients - many do not. The dentist may wish to conduct the same process for checking your entitlement to NHS care as a GP would. If you already have a GP, then the dental practice should contact the GP to ensure that they have undertaken an entitlement check. If accepted, you will need to give the dentist the NHS number on your medical card.

If you are entitled to NHS treatment, you may still have to make a contribution towards the cost of your dental treatment. If you are not entitled to NHS treatment, or the dentist you choose does not take NHS

patients (some dentists will only accept private patients), you will have to pay for the full cost of your treatment.

If you are eligible for **free prescriptions**, you will also be eligible for free dental treatment.

See the information on **claiming help towards health costs**.

Optical treatment

Eye care is provided by opticians who usually operate from high street shops.

You will normally have to pay a minimum charge for an eye test on the NHS (around £20) unless you are under 19 and in full-time study. If the test shows you need glasses or contact lenses, the optician will give you a prescription. The cost of frames and lenses varies considerably.

You can apply for help with the cost of your eye test and glasses on the basis of low income in the same way as for medical and dental treatment.

See the information on **claiming help towards health costs**.

Claiming help towards health costs

For information on claiming help towards NHS prescriptions, dental charges and optical costs, you should read the detailed guidance relating to the various countries of the UK.

England

For general guidance about health costs, visit: www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Abouthealthcosts.aspx

For specific information about prescription costs, visit: www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Prescriptioncosts.aspx

Wales

General guidance: wales.gov.uk/topics/health/nhswales/about/healthinformation/forms/?lang=en

Prescriptions: wales.gov.uk/topics/health/nhswales/about/healthinformation/prescriptions/?lang=en

Scotland

General guidance: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/NHS-Scotland/Health-Costs

Prescriptions: www.infoscotland.com/prescriptions

Northern Ireland

For general guidance and prescription costs, visit: www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/health-and-well-being/health-services/doctors-dentists-and-other-health-services/prescription-charges.htm

What if my immigration status is conditional on me having no recourse to public funds?

Health benefits are not classed as 'public funds', so your immigration status will not be affected if you claim and receive any help with your health costs.

Family planning

Family Planning Clinics offer free, confidential advice and information on contraception (birth control) and sexual health. They provide free condoms and other contraceptives, pregnancy tests and cervical smear tests. Their services are completely confidential and they will not pass on information about you to

anyone else.

Clinics can be used by, women, men and young people (including those under 16 years of age). You can refer yourself or be referred by your GP or other health workers. You may need to book an appointment to see the doctor but many centres also have walk-in clinics.

You can get details of your nearest Family Planning Clinic from your local telephone directory or www.yell.com, your GP surgery, hospital, local health authority or from the website of the Family Planning Association (FPA) at www.fpa.org.uk.

Alternative medicine

Many towns in Britain have clinics providing homeopathy, herbal medicine, osteopathy, acupuncture, aromatherapy etc. These kinds of treatment are not usually available on the NHS, though your GP may be able to put you in touch with local facilities; or you can contact the Institute for Complementary Medicine (see [address list](#)).

Preparing for British weather

The British weather is unpredictable, but generally the coldest daytime temperatures are in the period from November to February and are between 2°C and 9°C. The climate can seem harsh, and wet or windy weather will make it seem even colder. A good way of keeping warm is by layering your clothes – wearing T-shirts or shirts under a woollen jumper, with a warm jacket or coat over the top, depending on how cold it is. You may also want to buy thermal underwear. A waterproof coat, an umbrella and strong shoes are useful in the rain.

Most of these things may be cheaper to buy in Britain, so check first with your institution on the comparative costs, but you need to arrive with enough warm clothes for your first few days.

Try to ensure that the rooms you live and work in are warm enough, and that you have plenty of bedding at night. Not all buildings have double glazing or central heating, and dampness can make you feel colder. On the other hand, be careful not to keep your room too hot, as gas and electricity can be expensive - and it will feel even colder when you do go out.

If your clothes do get wet, make sure you dry them out thoroughly before you wear them again.

Healthy eating

Eating the right food, and enough of it, is vital for keeping warm and healthy. If you are living in a catered hall of residence you will probably be given a balanced diet, but you should still be careful to make sure that you eat enough fresh fruit and vegetables. If you have special dietary requirements (for example, for religious or cultural reasons) make sure the catering authorities know about them.

If you are cooking for yourself, eating healthily can be more difficult, especially if preparing your own meals is new to you. Most big towns have stores or areas where you can buy food from different parts of the world, so you may be able to find food that is familiar.

A healthy diet is one which includes elements from all the main food groups (protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals). You should try to eat something from each of the following groups every day:

- bread, rice, pasta or cereals
- milk, cheese, yoghurt
- fresh fruit and vegetables
- meat, fish, eggs, lentils, nuts or beans

It can be fun experimenting with new and different types of food if you have the time, and cooking does

not have to be expensive. Food costs vary. As a rule, supermarkets will be cheaper than the corner shop and street markets will be cheaper than supermarkets. Vegetables that are in season (that is, grown locally and available without being stored or imported) are usually a cheap source of food.

When preparing food, keep in mind that it is important to take some simple steps to avoid food poisoning (caused by different sorts of bacteria):

- put chilled and frozen food in the fridge or freezer as soon as possible
- prepare and store raw and cooked food separately
- make sure the coldest part of the fridge is below 5°C
- use food before the 'use by' date
- keep animals away from food
- always wash your hands thoroughly before preparing food and especially after going to the toilet
- keep your kitchen clean
- defrost and cook food thoroughly especially eggs, poultry and meat.

If sometimes you do not have the time or inclination to cook for yourself, a meal at your institution or student union refectory will probably be the cheapest alternative. Restaurants can be expensive, although local cafes can be good value for money.

Sexual health

British attitudes to sex may be different from those in your own country. It is often accepted that people who are involved in a relationship may have sex together. Of course, the choice is a personal one. You are entirely free to live according to your personal standards and should not feel pressured to adopt those of your fellow students.

Contraception (see also [Family planning](#))

If you become involved in a sexual relationship, you may wish to consider how you will avoid pregnancy. You can get advice on contraception from your doctor, or from a local Family Planning Clinic (FPC). Your institution's welfare service will have details of where to go.

If you qualify for NHS treatment, you are entitled to free contraceptives and advice on birth control from any FPC. FPCs also provide cervical smear and pregnancy tests.

Using a rubber sheath, or condom, as a form of contraception can also prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases between partners. Condoms can easily be bought from chemists, public toilets, supermarkets and petrol stations.

HIV/AIDS

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus), which can affect the body's normal defence against illness. The virus is passed on by an exchange of body fluids, through unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner (of the same or the opposite sex), by sharing needles and drug injecting equipment, and from an infected pregnant woman to her child. Using a condom can reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS in sexual intercourse. Some people carry HIV for a number of years without developing AIDS or showing symptoms.

You are not at risk from HIV/AIDS from: sharing food, drinks, clothes, crockery or toilet seats; shaking hands; coughing, sneezing or day to day contact with an infected person. If you are concerned about the risks of AIDS, or want to talk confidentially, you can contact one of the telephone helplines listed in the address list below.

If you are not entitled to full NHS treatment, the initial diagnostic test for HIV/AIDS and any associated counselling will be free of charge. However, in England and Wales, any other treatment for HIV/AIDS will be chargeable.

Information about specific health issues

Meningitis (and septicaemia)

Meningitis is an illness caused by bacteria or viruses. Whilst viral meningitis can be very nasty it is almost never life-threatening and most people will soon make a full recovery. Bacterial meningitis is more serious and most cases are caused by meningococcal bacteria. These bacteria also cause septicaemia, the blood poisoning and far more threatening form of the disease. The illness tends to affect children and young adults and you may hear of cases amongst students.

Students on higher education courses in the UK are likely to be offered a meningitis vaccination when they start their course. The vaccination protects against one of the common strains of the disease, but does not protect against all strains of the illness.

Most institutions and GP surgeries have information about how to recognise the symptoms of meningitis. There has been a concerted effort in recent years to make students aware of this illness. When detected early it can be effectively treated, but if allowed to develop it can be fatal. Read any information you are given about meningitis carefully so that you know what to look out for and what to do if you suspect that someone you know may have the illness.

Even if you are not otherwise entitled to full NHS treatment, any treatment for meningitis will be free of charge.

The 'Common Cold'

The common cold is caused by a virus that irritates the nose and throat, causing sneezing and coughing. It is a very common illness in the winter months. There is no effective cure for the common cold. However, getting plenty of rest, and drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids and fruit juices, will aid recovery. A cold will usually pass after a few days. However, if symptoms get worse, or the cold lasts for a long time, you should consult your GP.

Many British people continue to work or attend classes when they have a cold. You may recover more quickly, and reduce the risk of passing on the virus to fellow students, if you stay in bed and do not attend classes until you are feeling better - But don't forget to tell your tutor or the institution that you are ill.

Address list

National Health Service (NHS)

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS Direct

Tel: 0845 46 47

Textphone: 0845 606 4647 (for the deaf and hard of hearing)

Web: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Scotland

In Scotland NHS 24 provides a health advice and support service:

Tel: 08454 24 24 24.

Web: www.nhs24.com

HIV and AIDS

Terence Higgins Trust

314-320 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP
Adviser telephone helpline: 0845 122 1200
Web: www.tht.org.uk

The Terence Higgins Trust has centres across England, Wales and Scotland. It offers help and counselling to people with HIV and AIDS, their relatives and friends.

The Institute for Complementary Medicine

Can-Mezzanine, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH
Tel: 020 7922 7980
Fax: 020 7922 7981
Email: info@icmedicine.co.uk
Web: www.icmedicine.co.uk

It has a database of registered alternative medicine practitioners throughout the UK.

24 Hour meningitis helpline

Meningitis Research Foundation

Tel: 0808 800 3344 (freephone) - operated by trained staff and nurses 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
Web: www.meningitis.org

This website has information in 22 languages.

Vaccinations

You can find NHS information about vaccination at www.immunisation.nhs.uk.

Endsleigh Insurance Services Ltd

Web: www.endsleigh.co.uk

Telephone numbers

If you are calling from outside the UK, do not dial the (0) in the telephone numbers above. For example, if you want to call UKCISA from outside the UK, dial +44 20 7107 9922. If you are in the UK, do not dial +44, but do start the number with 0. For example, if you call UKCISA from within the UK, dial 020 7107 9922.

Textphone numbers are only for those who use a textphone (minicom) because of difficulties with speech or hearing.

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