

FIREARMS LICENSING AND MEDICAL EVIDENCE: FACTSHEET

New referral system of medical suitability of gun owners

A safer system for firearms licensing is being introduced in April to improve information sharing between GPs and police and reduce the risk that a medically unfit person may be able to possess a firearm or shotgun.

From 1 April 2016:

- **On the grant or renewal of a firearm or shotgun certificate police will ask every certificate holder's GP if the patient suffers from specific health issues (see below).**
- **GPs will be asked to place a firearm reminder code on the patient's record.** This means the GP will know the person is a gun owner, and they can inform the police licensing department if the patient's health deteriorates after the certificate is granted.
- **New guidance will be published to help GPs and police operate the new system, and to inform certificate holders and applicants.** Responsibility for deciding if a person is suitable to hold a firearm or shotgun certificate remains with the police.

Why is the system changing?

The new system has been developed following recommendations for change from coroners and the IPCC, and after the British Medical Association voiced concerns about weaknesses in the current process. It has been developed by the police and GP representatives, in conjunction with shooting organisations and the Information Commissioners Office.

Further improvements are planned for introduction later this year when police will contact each applicant's GP during the application process instead of after the certificate is granted. Guidance will be issued prior to introduction of these additional improvements.

What types of application will the new system apply to?

The new system will apply to every application for the grant or renewal of a firearm or shotgun certificate in England and Wales on or after 1 April 2016.

Will these changes be introduced across the UK?

The new system will be introduced in England and Wales on 1 April. Because processes in Scotland may differ, separate guidance is being issued in summer 2016 regarding medical information in Scotland. The firearm and shotgun application forms apply in England, Wales and Scotland. The new system does not apply to Northern Ireland which has separate firearms legislation and processes.

What fee will the GP charge for the report if one is needed?

The level of any fee charged will depend on factors including the amount of time spent by the GP in compiling the report.

If a medical report is needed, who will pay?

During the application process

- Where a medical report is needed because the applicant has declared a medical condition on the application form – the applicant will pay the fee.
- If a further medical report is required – the police will pay the fee.

During the validity of a firearm or shotgun certificate

- Initial GP check of the patient record in response to the standard police letter – there is no expectation of a fee.
- Where a medical report is needed because the GP has raised concerns or because the police require sight of a medical report for another reason – the police will pay the fee.

Will applicants still need to declare on the application form if they are suffering from a medical condition which could affect their ability to possess a gun safely?

Yes, applicants will still need to declare relevant medical conditions (and these are listed in the Notes to Form 201 and below).

What medical conditions must be declared?

Relevant medical conditions are:

- Acute Stress Reaction or an acute reaction to the stress caused by trauma
- Suicidal thoughts or self harm
- Depression or anxiety
- Dementia
- Mania, bipolar disorder or a psychotic illness
- A personality disorder
- A neurological condition: for example, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's or Huntington's diseases, or epilepsy
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Any other mental or physical condition which might affect your safe possession of firearms or shotguns

How will introduction of the GP firearms code make the process safer?

At present there is no system in place to remind the GP that their patient is a gun owner. A person could be medically fit when they are granted a certificate (which lasts for five years), but their health could deteriorate later on. The reminder code enables the GP to discuss the issue with the patient and if necessary inform the police, who can then review the person's suitability.

How long will the firearms code stay on the patient record?

The 'live' firearm code will remain on the patient record while the firearm or shotgun certificate is valid. Police will inform GPs when certificates are revoked, cancelled or expire so that GPs can inactivate the firearm code. The code and any information related to it will remain indefinitely on the patient record but in an 'inactivated' state.

Why have the firearm and shotgun application forms been amended?

The forms have been amended to reflect the new process and so that applicants understand how their medical information may be shared between GPs and police. The new firearm and shotgun application form is Form 201, and this also contains the Notes which will assist with completing the application. The new firearm variation form is Form 201V.

Will police still accept applications made on the old application form?

Applications may be submitted to police on the old application forms provided that they are received by the police on or before 1 June 2016. After this transitional period the new application forms must be used. The new forms can be downloaded from police websites and may be typed or handwritten.

What happens if my GP does not want to operate the new system?

Another GP in the practice can provide the information. If this is not possible, you should discuss this with the police firearms licensing department. Applicants and certificate holders should not be disadvantaged if their GP does not provide the information needed.

Will this mean the grant/renewal process will take longer than it does now?

No. From 1 April each certificate holder's GP will be contacted by police following grant of the certificate. Liaison between the police and GPs prior to grant of the certificate will occur in a minority of cases, as happens now.

How will I know that information about guns in my house will not fall into the wrong hands?

Due care will be exercised by GP practices in relation to information about firearms in the same way that sensitive medical information is handled.

Where can I obtain more detailed information about the new system?

Guidance documents setting out how the new process works are available on Gov.UK as part of the Home Office Firearms Guide.