Provision of General Practitioner Services without Fees to Children aged 5 years and under

FAQs

What GP service was announced as part of Budget 2014?
The Government announced that it would provide all children under 6 years with access to a GP service without fees. The provision of a GP service without fees for children under 6 years represents the first phase in the provision of a universal GP service for the entire population, without fees at the point of service. Legislation is currently being prepared to underpin this new service.

The core of the Government Health Reform Programme, as set out in “Future Health - A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service, 2012-2015” is the creation of a single tier health service, supported by Universal Health Insurance and encompassing universal primary care, with GP care free at the point of service for all.

What does this measure mean?
Currently, about 180,000 children under 6 years have access to a GP service without fees, under a medical card or a GP visit card, and it is estimated that at present about 240,000 children under 6 years must pay when they attend a GP. The new measure will provide a GP service without fees to all 420,000 children under 6 years.

This initiative means that an additional 240,000 children under 6 years will have access to a GP service without fees. In terms of phasing in a universal GP service, almost half of the entire population will have access to GP services without fees after this measure is implemented.

Has the Government provided funding for this new service?
The Government has provided new, additional funding of €37 million to meet the cost of this measure to provide a GP service to an additional 240,000 children under 6 years.

What is happening now?
In the context of this measure, a draft GP contract document has been developed on the basis that all children under 6 years will be granted a right of access to a GP service under new enabling legislation, which is currently being drafted.

A consultation process started today (Friday 31st January) relating to the content and scope of the contract. Alex White, Minister of State for Primary Care met with key stakeholders - the Irish College of General Practitioners, the Irish Medical Organisation and the National Association of General Practitioners – to brief them on Government policy concerning the introduction of a universal GP service without fees and in particular, on the first phase concerning children under 6 years. The meetings included a presentation on the key features of the draft contract. Advertisements were placed in the national newspapers for publication on Saturday 1st February 2014 inviting the general public to submit their views on the contract to the HSE. The draft contract is available for review on the HSE website at www.hse.ie/under6contract. The closing date for receipt of written submissions by the HSE is 21st February 2014.

In parallel with the public consultation on the content and scope of the contract, the Department of Health and the HSE will engage in an exercise to develop a fee structure which will be the subject of further consultation with relevant stakeholders. Once the fee structure is determined, the setting of the fee rates will be a matter for the Minister for Health, subject to the provisions of the legislation currently being drafted.
When will GP services be available without fees to children under 6 years?
The implementation of this measure requires the introduction of primary legislation through the Oireachtas. Preparation of this legislation has already commenced. The necessary administrative arrangements will be made by the HSE when the specifics of the legislation are known. It is expected that GPs will commence the provision of services without fees to children under 6 years in June/July 2014 after the legislation has been enacted, the consultation process has been concluded and the contract has been made available to GPs.

Will all children under 6 years qualify for free GP services under this legislation?
All children who have not reached their 6th birthday will qualify for GP services without fees under this legislation.

What is my child entitled to under this legislation?
Under this legislation, all children under 6 years are entitled to be provided, without fees, services covered by this contract by the GP contract holder on whose panel the child is registered, or in an unforeseen emergency by another GP contract holder.

How will this new legislation impact my child if they already have a medical card?
If your child already has a medical card, they will continue to hold entitlement to the other services which they currently avail of under their medical card.

Are there any times when I will have to pay for GP services when I bring my child (under 6 years) to their GP?
GPs, who hold a contract under this legislation, must not seek payment from a person in respect of any services provided to a child under 6 years that is covered by this contract. Services provided outside the terms of this contract are a matter of private contract between you and your GP.

Can our family GP refuse to treat my child free of charge under this new legislation?
Under the existing medical card and GP visit card contracts, it is always open to GPs to choose to participate or not in those schemes. This will also apply in relation to the under 6 GP contract. As with the existing contracts, under these new provisions a doctor may not be able to take on a new patient, for example, if he or she already has too many patients on his/her GMS panel. In general, doctors would not normally have more than 2,000 GMS patients on their GMS panel.

What should I do if our family GP refuses to accept my child on to his/her panel of patients under this new legislation?
Following enactment of the legislation, if a parent/guardian has had three unsuccessful attempts to secure a GMS doctor who will register their child (under 6 years) on his/her panel, the parent/guardian should contact the HSE, providing details of the doctors they have contacted, and the HSE will assign their child to a GMS doctor within the locality. The purpose of a GMS patient either choosing or being assigned to one GP is to ensure continuity of care.

What happens when my child reaches their 6th birthday?
Generally, the GP service arrangements applying to the parents of the child will apply to the child when he/she reaches 6 years of age. In the main, if the parents or the child hold a medical card or GP visit card, the child will continue to have access to GP services without fees. Similarly, if the parents of the child or the child do not hold a medical card or a GP visit card, they may have to pay the GP for their child’s future consultations with the GP after he/she reaches the age of 6 years; this is a private arrangement between the GP and the patient.

When will implementation of this measure take place?
The necessary administrative arrangements will be made by the HSE when the specifics of the legislation are known.