

Version 1, published 26 July 2013

Announcement of methodological changes to *Prescriptions dispensed in the community; England 2002 – 2012, [NS]*¹

Background

This bulletin presents a summary of prescriptions dispensed in the community in England. The statistics are derived from the system for reimbursing contractors for dispensing medicines and dressings and appliances, run by NHS Prescription Services. The specific source for these statistics is the Prescription Cost Analysis system (PCA), figures for which are published annually as a National Statistic, by the Health and Social Care Information Centre, in April.

Statistics relating to the number of prescription items dispensed which were exempt from the prescription charge were published, by exemption category, in this report until 2007. This information was compiled using a 1 in 20 sample of all exempt items.

Following a change in the system for pricing prescriptions and for capturing prescription charge exemption status, these figures have not been available since 2008. NHS Prescription Services were unable to reliably estimate the data for each exemption category and thus only limited data was available for 2008 to 2011 as follows:

- the number of prescription items charged for at the point of dispensing
- the number which were contraceptives
- and the number personally administered

In January 2012, a new methodology to report exemption data was set up, which records the reason for any exemption for each prescription. Nearly all prescriptions are processed through this methodology, with the exception of 0.1 per cent of items, (approximately 1 million items), which are processed manually. This new reporting methodology is able to report at a national level, the number of items dispensed in each exemption category for 2012.

These exemption figures are based on all exempt prescriptions rather than on a 1 in 20 sample of exempt prescriptions, which was used prior to 2008.

The exemption figures for 2012 are presented (as percentages) in Table 42 in the report, alongside the percentage figures for 2007, when exemption figures were last available. Any comparison between the percentages in 2007 and 2012 must be viewed with some caution, given the differences in derivation explained above.

There is currently no information on costs by exemption category or any further breakdown of the information for 2012.

¹ [NS] denotes that the publication has National Statistics status