

Health Bulletin:

How to Find a Doctor



#23 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

A regular doctor or other health care provider can help you and your family stay healthy.

- People with a regular doctor are more likely to live longer and healthier lives.
- A doctor who knows you and your medical history is best able to provide the care you need, based on your specific health needs.
- You're more likely to feel comfortable with a doctor you see regularly, so you can talk about *any* health issue, including sexual health and alcohol and drug use.
- No one should have to go without medical care because they don't have money to pay for it – help is available!

How to Find a Doctor or Other Health Care Provider

If you DO have health insurance:

- Get a regular doctor through your health plan.
- Many health plans require you to choose a *primary care provider* as your regular doctor.

If you DON'T have health insurance:

- Many people and families qualify for free or low-cost government health insurance programs (*see page 2*).
- Other health insurance options are available for small businesses and working individuals (*see More Information*).
- Even if you don't qualify for insurance, you can still get good health care, regardless of your immigration status or ability to pay. Call 311 to find out how to get medical or dental care at a public hospital, child health clinic, or community health clinic.

How a Regular Doctor Can Help Keep You Healthy

The doctor you see for most of your medical care is called a *primary care provider*. This doctor will:

- Take your medical history and conduct physical examinations.
- Prescribe medications and give immunizations.
- Check your weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure regularly and help you keep them under control.
- Make sure you get important tests, such as screening to prevent cancer.
- Talk to you about your personal health risks and explain how to reduce them.
- Coordinate your health care and refer you to specialists when needed.

Steps You Can Take

1. Think about what kind of doctor you want.

- Is the doctor experienced with your particular health conditions or needs?
- Is the doctor board certified? (This means the doctor has special training and has passed an advanced exam in a particular area of medicine.)
- Is the doctor highly rated by a person or group you respect?
- Are you more comfortable seeing a woman or a man?
- Are you more comfortable seeing a doctor who speaks your native language?
- Does the doctor or a member of the staff give advice over the phone for common medical problems?
- How long will you need to wait before you can get an appointment?
- Can the doctor see people on short notice if you need care right away?
- Are the doctor's office location and hours convenient for you?

2. Get a list of doctors to choose from.

- If you have insurance, get a list of providers from your health plan.
- Get a recommendation from a health care worker (such as a nurse).
- Ask family, friends, or neighbors about their doctors.
- Call the doctor referral service at the hospital of your choice.

3. Find out about the doctors on your list.

- Call or visit and ask questions (*see Step 1*).
- Ask if the doctor is a participating provider with your insurance plan and can take new patients.



Free or Low-Cost Government Health Insurance Programs

Almost all children and pregnant women qualify for one of these programs, regardless of immigration status. Anyone who needs emergency medical care can get it, regardless of immigration status or ability to pay.

Program	Who Is Eligible?	Cost	Income and Other Requirements
Medicare www.medicare.gov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People 65 and older. • People with certain disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Premiums, co-payments, or deductibles may apply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No income requirements.
Medicaid www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/serv_medicaid.html	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children 18 and younger (Child Health Plus A) • People 19 to 64 with low incomes. • Pregnant women. • Certain low-income people 65 and older receiving Medicare. • Persons with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free (no premiums). • Limited financial resources or assets. • Co-payments may apply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income.
Child Health Plus B www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/chplus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children 18 and younger (even if eligible for private insurance). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free or low-cost premiums. • No co-payments or deductibles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No family income requirements. • Uninsured. • Not eligible for Medicaid.
Family Health Plus www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/fhplus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People 19 to 64. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free (no premiums, co-payments, or deductibles). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income. • Uninsured. • Not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid.

To find out if you qualify, call 311

More Information

- Mayor's Office of Health Insurance Access (HealthStat): visit nyc.gov/healthstat or call 311 — help to enroll in government insurance programs and information on health insurance options for small businesses, sole proprietors, and working individuals, including:
 - **HealthPass:** www.healthpass.com
 - **Healthy NY:** www.healthyny.com
 - **Long Island Association Health Alliance:** www.liahealthalliance.com
 - **Brooklyn HealthWorks:** www.brooklynhealthworks.com
 - **Working Today:** www.workingtoday.org
- New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: nyc.gov/health or call 311
- New York State Physician Profile (for information about a doctor's education, background, and medical specialties): www.nydoctorprofile.com
- Department of Veterans Affairs (health care for military veterans): www.va.gov/health_benefits

311 for Non-Emergency NYC Services • Telephone Interpretation in 170 Languages

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