

High Blood Pressure Reading in the Pharmacy

NICE NG136 (2019, updated 2023) | NHS HCFS

■ ACTION: Call 999 Immediately

- Chest pain, tightness, or sudden tearing pain radiating to the back
- Severe or sudden-onset headache with a very high reading
- Facial weakness, arm weakness, or difficulty speaking (stroke signs)
- Confusion, altered consciousness, or hypertensive encephalopathy
- Breathlessness at rest or visual disturbance or sudden visual loss
- Pregnancy: systolic above 160 or diastolic above 110 with any symptoms

Do not ask the patient to make their own way to hospital. Call 999 and stay with them.

Systolic / Diastolic	Significance	Action
Below 140/90	Normal or controlled	Reassure; lifestyle advice
140-159 / 90-99	Stage 1 (if confirmed)	GP appointment; consider ABPM
160-179 / 100-109	Stage 2 hypertension	Same-day GP if symptomatic or undiagnosed
Above 180 / above 110	Severe: urgent assessment needed	999 if symptoms; same-day GP if not

Before repeating the reading: Seat patient for at least 5 minutes, feet flat on the floor, correct cuff size. Consider recent caffeine, smoking, exercise, anxiety, or pain (all can temporarily raise blood pressure).

■ ACTION: Same-Day GP or 111

- Systolic above 180 or diastolic above 110, symptom-free: same-day assessment required
- Readings 160-179 with headache, visual symptoms, or chest discomfort
- Known hypertensive patient with readings significantly above usual
- Pregnancy: any reading above 140/90 mmHg; same-day assessment
- Pregnancy: systolic above 160 or diastolic above 110; urgent obstetric review
- Upper abdominal or right upper quadrant pain in a pregnant patient

✓ ACTION: Reassure, Advise, and Consider ABPM

- Mildly elevated reading (140/90 or above), no symptoms, calm rested patient: offer ABPM if commissioned
- ABPM is the gold standard for hypertension diagnosis (NICE NG136): daytime average above 135/85 confirms diagnosis
- Already under GP review; reading not significantly above usual: reassure and continue monitoring
- Lifestyle advice: reduce salt and alcohol, stop smoking, increase activity, reduce caffeine
- Recommend home monitoring (validated device); decisions are based on multiple readings

If your pharmacy offers the NHS Hypertension Case-Finding Service, a reading of 140/90 or above on two occasions is the trigger to offer ABPM rather than just GP referral.

Key reminders: The number alone does not determine urgency; always ask about headache, chest pain, vision, breathlessness, and pregnancy first. A single reading does not diagnose hypertension; ABPM removes white-coat effect and gives a more reliable average.