

Focus on Hypertension Case Finding

Taking Blood Pressure in Community Pharmacy

Community pharmacies are often the most accessible point of health care for many people, and for some patients, a pharmacy visit may be the only opportunity to have their blood pressure checked.

While it's important to make the most of these encounters, ensuring the reading is taken at the right time is essential. Blood pressure can be temporarily raised by stress, activity, pain, or recent procedures such as vaccinations.

Taking a reading at the wrong moment may lead to false high results, unnecessary patient worry, and avoidable GP referrals. This guide supports pharmacy teams to balance convenience with accuracy, ensuring every BP check is meaningful and clinically reliable.

Choosing the right time

Avoid taking a BP measurement:

- **Immediately before or after a vaccination**
 - Anxiety, mild pain, or stress can cause a temporary rise in BP
 - Wait at least 15–30 minutes post-vaccination before measuring, if possible
- **After physical exertion or activity**
 - Allow the patient to rest quietly for at least 5 minutes before taking a reading
- **After caffeine, smoking, or a large meal**
 - These can temporarily raise BP
 - Ideally, wait 30 minutes after caffeine or smoking, and 1 hour after eating
- **During times of acute stress or pain**
 - Delay the reading until the patient is calm and comfortable
- **When the patient has recently taken OTC medicines known to raise blood pressure**
 - Over-the-counter medications, particularly nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and decongestants, can cause temporary BP elevation
 - Always ask about recent use of any medications, including OTC and herbal products
 - If a patient reports they have recently taken something that may elevate BP, it may be necessary to arrange another visit for a more reliable reading
- **With a full bladder**
 - A full bladder adds 10 – 15mmHg





1. Preparing the patient

- Create a calm, quiet, and private space for BP measurement which is free from distractions 
- Reduce noise and interruptions where possible (phones, conversations, tills)
- Encourage the patient to take a moment to relax and breathe normally before the reading
- Explaining the process helps to reduce anxiety. Use calm, unhurried communication to put the patient at ease
- Ensure the patient is seated comfortably with back supported – An unsupported back can add 5-10mmHg
- Feet flat on the floor – unsupported feet can add 5-10 mmHg
- Legs uncrossed – Crossed legs can add 2-8mmHg
- Arm supported at heart level – an unsupported arm can add 10mmHg. If arm below heart level readings are too high. If arm above heart level readings will be too low
- Ask the patient to remove outer clothing on the upper arm if needed – taking a BP over clothing can increase the measurement by 10-40mmHg
- Check for recent activity – ask when they last had caffeine, smoked, exercised, or ate
- Encourage quiet rest for at least 5 minutes before the measurement

2. During the measurement

- Use a validated, well-maintained BP monitor suitable for the patient (correct cuff size and arm type) 
- Take the reading in a quiet area with minimal distractions
- Avoid talking during the measurement, both pharmacist and patient – Talking can add 10 – 15mmHg
- Repeat readings in line with the service specification

3. After the measurement

- Explain the results to the patient and offer ABPM in line with the service specification, if appropriate 
- Record the results on your IT platform
- Notify the GP in line with the service specification

Examples of good timing with other services

Situation	Recommendation
Flu/COVID vaccination clinic	Offer BP check before the appointment if calm, or 15–30 minutes after if the patient is anxious
NMS or DMS consultation	Ideal opportunity if the patient is relaxed and seated
During routine medication pick-up	Suitable if the patient hasn't just walked briskly or had caffeine
After a stressful conversation or health scare	Delay until the patient feels calm