# 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 breathlessness at rest
- ☐ Visual disturbance or sudden visual loss
- ☐ Severe hypertension in pregnancy, or any symptoms of pre-eclampsia (headache, visual disturbance, swelling, upper abdominal pain)

Do not ask the patient to make their own way to hospital. Call 999 and stay with them. If a patient appears acutely unwell at any BP level, clinical judgement overrides thresholds.

## SCENE: Pharmacy Assessment Framework

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| **S** | **Symptoms of organ damage?** | Headache, chest pain, visual symptoms, stroke signs, breathlessness: these require 999, not reassurance. |
| **C** | **Context and background?** | Known hypertensive? Pregnant? Missed doses? Recent caffeine, exercise, anxiety, steroid, or stimulant use? |
| **E** | **Emergency or same-day?** | Symptoms + very high BP: call 999. Severe BP without symptoms: same-day assessment. Severe asymptomatic hypertension is not a hypertensive emergency, but still requires same-day assessment. |
| **N** | **Number: repeat before acting** | Sit quietly for 5 minutes, then repeat. A single high reading rarely determines management. |
| **E** | **Escalate or reassure?** | Escalate: very high reading with symptoms, or any hypertension in pregnancy. Reassure: mildly elevated, rested, asymptomatic, no red flags. |

## ACTION: Same-Day Assessment (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 symptoms
- ☐ Known hypertensive with readings significantly above usual level
- ☐ Any hypertension in pregnancy: same-day maternity assessment

Severe asymptomatic hypertension is not a hypertensive emergency, but still requires same-day assessment. Symptoms and organ damage determine urgency, not the number alone.

## ACTION: Reassure, Advise, and Follow Up

- ☐ Mildly elevated, no symptoms, calm rested patient: repeat after 5 minutes; lifestyle advice
- ☐ Lifestyle advice: reduce salt and alcohol, stop smoking, increase activity
- ☐ Recommend home monitoring with a validated device
- ☐ If enrolled in NHS Hypertension Case-Finding Service: follow the commissioned pathway and local eligibility criteria when deciding whether to offer ABPM

ABPM is the gold standard for confirming hypertension (NICE NG136). Daytime ABPM average of 135/85 or above confirms the diagnosis.

**Key reminders:** Symptoms matter more than numbers. Severe asymptomatic hypertension needs same-day review, not 999. A single reading does not diagnose hypertension. In pregnancy, pre-eclampsia can progress rapidly: urgently refer if symptoms are present.