

Will the EHIC be valid after Brexit?

Europe

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By Reality Check team

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Reality Check



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If you are getting ready to go on holiday to another EU country or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, you are likely to be packing your European Health Insurance

Card (EHIC) along with your passport.

The EHIC entitles you to state-provided medical treatment should you need it while visiting one of those countries.

The UK has issued **27 million EHIC cards** .

They **cover pre-existing medical conditions** as well as emergency care if you have an accident or become ill on holiday. Individuals with chronic illnesses, for example those who require daily dialysis, can travel to the EU as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, knowing they would receive the necessary treatment on the same terms as the citizens of the country they are visiting.

EHIC after Brexit

With Brexit currently expected on 29 March 2019, what is likely to happen to EHIC provision after that date?

The UK and the EU have reached agreement in principle that there should be a transition period between 29 March 2019 and 31 December 2020 to allow more time for negotiations on the future UK-EU relationship. During the transition, or implementation period as the UK government prefers to call it, all EU law will continue to apply in the UK. That would mean that citizens would have exactly the same rights and guarantees as before - so, you'll still be able to use your card.

But the transition period will only come into effect if the **withdrawal agreement** is ratified by both the EU and the UK before Brexit day and there are still some significant challenges to overcome, such as the Irish border issue.

What happens after the transition period in 2021 and beyond is not clear, as this will be decided as part of the negotiations on the future EU-UK relationship.

In the **Brexit White Paper** published on 12 July 2018, the UK government said it wanted "UK and EU nationals to continue to be able to use the EHIC to receive health care should they need it while on holiday".

What if there is no deal?

A **House of Lords report in March 2018** warned that "in the absence of an agreement on future relations that covers this topic, the rights currently enjoyed by 27 million UK citizens, thanks to the EHIC, will cease after Brexit".

If the UK left with no deal at all, then there could be attempts to put some kind of emergency measures in place for UK citizens or to agree reciprocal deals with individual EU countries but it is impossible to say at this point what the outcome might be.

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A spokesman told BBC News the government was increasingly confident it would secure a deal with the EU but was also planning "for the unlikely scenario in which it is not possible to reach a mutually beneficial agreement and the UK exits the EU without a deal".

"We are working to build our understanding of the systems, processes and infrastructure needed in member states to ensure that the safety of both UK and EU patients is protected in all scenarios."

The UK has **reciprocal health insurance deals** with a few non-EU countries, including Australia and New Zealand, under which visitors can receive free urgent treatment. These will be unaffected by Brexit negotiations.

UK citizens living in the EU

There are about one million UK citizens who already live abroad in the European Union. What will happen to their access to healthcare in those EU countries after Brexit?

They are currently eligible for the same healthcare as citizens of the EU country they live in and they can use their EHIC when they travel to another EU country as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein, for emergency healthcare.

So far, **the EU and the UK have provisionally agreed** that these people would be able to retain their rights, both on healthcare and the EHIC. The same would apply for EU citizens in the UK.

But, this will only come into effect only if the **withdrawal agreement** is ratified by both the EU and the UK before Brexit day.

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