



# A benefits briefing from The ME Association

January 2020

## THE BLUE BADGE SCHEME

### WHAT ARE THE QUALIFYING CRITERIA?

Children and adolescents can qualify for a Blue Badge but they must be two years old or over.

Automatic eligibility is available if you meet one of the following disability criteria:

- get the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- get the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – scoring eight points or more in the ‘moving around’ part of the assessment
- you are registered blind
- meet certain Armed Forces or War Pensioner requirements

You may also be eligible if you:

- drive regularly, have a severe disability in both arms, and are unable to operate all or some types of parking meter
- have a permanent and substantial disability that causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking.

### SCHEME NOW EXTENDED TO PEOPLE WITH ‘HIDDEN DISABILITIES’

From 30 August 2019, the Blue Badge scheme was extended to people with ‘hidden disabilities’ including people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health conditions.

### WHAT IS THE BLUE BADGE SCHEME?

**The Blue Badge Scheme provides a range of parking concessions on public roads throughout the UK. The concessions are designed to assist people who have more severe problems with mobility and have difficulty using public transport.**

**Having a Blue Badge also means that your car should normally be exempt from wheel-clamping, or being towed away on both public and private roads – provided you are displaying your badge.**

**Blue Badge holders in London also qualify for a 100% exemption from the London Congestion Charge – but you must register with Transport for London (TfL) at least 10 days before your journey and pay a one-off £10 registration fee. A registration form can be downloaded from the TfL website – [www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk) – or phone the Congestion Charging Office on 0343 222 2222.**

In particular, the new criteria extend eligibility to people who:

- cannot undertake a journey without there being a risk of serious harm to their health or safety, or that of any other person
- cannot undertake a journey without it causing them considerable psychological distress
- have very considerable difficulty when walking (both the physical act and the experience of walking).

### HOW DO YOU APPLY?

Local authorities assess the applications and administer the Blue Badge scheme.

More information and application forms can be obtained by contacting the appropriate council department or by going on to your local authority website.

### FILLING IN THE FORM: WHAT SORT OF INFORMATION IS REQUIRED?

If you meet one of the automatic qualifying criteria, this should be very straightforward.

If this is not the case, it is most important to provide accurate and up-to-date medical information about your mobility problems.

The specific questions will relate to the nature of your illness/disability; the maximum distance you can walk without help or severe discomfort; and whether you regularly use some form of walking aid. You will be asked to supply contact details for your GP – so that, where necessary, a medical report can be obtained.

Depending on the information you provide, and the policy of the local authority, you may be asked to attend a disability assessment by an occupational therapist.

There may be a non-refundable administration fee of up to £10 and you will need to enclose two passport-style photographs. The badge lasts for three years.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE IF YOUR APPLICATION IS TURNED DOWN?

There is no right of appeal if a local authority turns down an application. However, you can re-apply at a later date. You could also ask your local councillor to intervene if you feel you have a good case.

## WHERE DOES THE SCHEME OPERATE?

The Blue Badge scheme covers all of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The only exceptions are certain parts of London (ie City of London, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, part of Camden). In these boroughs, there is only limited recognition of the scheme – which includes designated disabled parking bays.

Transport for London have published a free guide to Blue Badge parking on their 'red routes' – in essence their main bus route network. It is available as a pdf which can be downloaded here: <http://lruc.content.tfl.gov.uk/blue-badge-holders-guide.pdf>

Some local councils have their own rules for certain parking bays and streets. So it's important to check the signs or the local authority website if you are going somewhere unfamiliar.

You should be able to obtain parking concessions in European countries that operate similar schemes. There is a free download

of a guide to the use of parking cards for people with disabilities in the EU. It can be found on the UK government's own website at <https://tinyurl.com/y8wpdl9n>

The Blue Badge Scheme does not cover off-street car parks, private roads and land, and most airports. However, an increasing number of shops and private car parks are making sure that they have designated spaces for disabled people.

## WHERE CAN YOU PARK?

Provided the vehicle is displaying a valid badge in the correct place, and it is being used by the disabled person for whom it was intended, you can normally:

- have free use of on-street parking meters and pay-and-display bays
- have exemptions from limits on parking times
- park for up to three hours on single or double yellow lines – so long as you are not causing an

obstruction or there is not a ban on loading or unloading.

Although the scheme operates throughout the UK, there are small variations in the way it applies in practice in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland from England.

More information can be obtained by looking at the Welsh Assembly government website; Scottish government website; or the Northern Ireland Roads Service website.

## MISUSE OF THE BLUE BADGE SCHEME

If you are a badge holder, it can only be used for your benefit. It is an offence if a badge is not removed from a vehicle and someone else takes advantage of the concessions. Misuse of the badge by a non-disabled person carries a fine of up to £1,000.

Increasing misuse of the scheme – and that includes theft of badges – means that many local authorities have tightened up their procedures.



**Do you need to talk?**

**CALL 0344 576 5326**

any day of the week  
between these hours:

10am-12noon,  
2-4pm and 7-9pm

Calls cost the same as other standard landline numbers (starting 01 and 02). If you have a call package for your landline or mobile phone, then calls will normally come out of your inclusive minutes.

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# ***TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN***

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## **Supportive evidence for a Blue Badge application from a person with ME/CFS**

### ***Date as Postmark***

I have been asked to provide some background information on the classification, severity and prognosis/permanency of ME/CFS (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome) in relation to a Blue Badge or wheelchair application.

### **CLASSIFICATION**

ME is classified by the World Health Organisation as a neurological disease in section G93:3 of ICD10 (International Classification of Diseases – version 10). CFS is indexed to this G93:3 classification. The Department of Health has repeatedly made it clear that it fully accepts this neurological classification.

### **SEVERITY**

It is estimated that up to 25% of people with ME/CFS fall into the severely affected category – meaning that they are largely or constantly housebound, wheelchair-bound or even bed-bound. This level of severity inevitably involves significant problems with mobility, balance, being able to stand unaided, and cognitive function (i.e problems with memory and concentration). People with ME/CFS also experience pain, which may be musculo-skeletal, arthralgic (affecting the joints) or neuropathic (nerve pain).

Those with moderate to severe ME/CFS will experience similar problems. And while they are not normally house-bound or wheelchair-bound, they may not be able to walk unaided for more than a short distance.

Research studies that have examined functional status and quality of life measures in ME/CFS confirm that the scale of impairment across a range of physical and mental activities can be just as great or greater than is seen in many other long term medical conditions, including cancer<sup>(1,2,3,4)</sup>.

### **PROGNOSIS**

Research studies into long term outcome indicate that only a small minority of people with ME/CFS return to previous levels of health and functioning. For many people ME/CFS is a long-term medical condition and once symptoms have persisted for more than 5 years the Chief Medical Officer's report on ME/CFS<sup>(4)</sup> concluded in section 1:4:3 on prognosis that full recovery becomes rare.

### **HOUSE OF LORDS QUESTION FROM THE COUNTESS OF MAR**

Concerns that people with ME/CFS are being refused a Blue Badge, even though they have very limited mobility, led to a parliamentary question in the House of Lords from the Countess of Mar in May 2012.

The Countess of Mar asked the Government why – in the guidance related to Blue Badge eligibility – conditions including myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) are expressly identified as not being “in themselves a qualification for a badge”; and to what other medical conditions this guidance relates.

the ME association



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### **Patrons**

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Member of the  
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Quality and confidence for  
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Association  
Company limited by guarantee  
No. 2361986  
Registered in England  
Registered Charity Number  
801279

**In a written answer supplied on 15 May 2012, Government spokesman Lord Attlee replied:**

“Eligibility for a Blue Badge is set out in the governing regulations. These are the Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (England) 2000, as amended. Since the 1980s, the regulations allow people to apply to local authorities for a badge through two main routes: ‘without further assessment’ and ‘with further assessment’.

“Under the ‘with further assessment’ category, a person may be eligible for a badge if they have a permanent and substantial disability which means they are unable to walk or have very considerable difficulty walking.

“It is for the relevant local authority to make decisions on whether or not a person is eligible for a badge. To help ensure consistency, the Department for Transport issues non-statutory guidance to local authorities on the factors that should be taken into account when they are making an assessment. As part of major reforms to the scheme, the department published updated guidance in June 2011 and again in February 2012.

The guidance is intended to explain that eligibility for a badge under the ‘with further assessment’ criteria is not condition-specific. Local authorities should take into account the effect of a person’s condition on their ability to walk. The guidance gives examples of conditions like myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) and mental and cognitive impairments like autism and dementia. In these cases, people might be eligible for a badge if their condition means they are unable to walk or have very considerable difficulty walking. They might, however, not be eligible if their ability to walk is unaffected.

“As part of wide-ranging reforms, the Government considered extending eligibility for a Blue Badge. They announced on February 2011 that they had no plans to extend eligibility to other groups of disabled people. With over 2.5 million badges already on issue, the Government decided that it was important to ensure the Blue Badge scheme remains sustainable in the long term and that it protected the concession for those who need it the most, that is, those who are unable to walk or have considerable difficulty walking.”

This parliamentary reply makes it quite clear that people with ME/CFS should be eligible for a Blue Badge if their condition means that they are unable to walk, or have very considerable difficulty in walking.

**Dr Charles Shepherd**  
**Hon Medical Adviser, ME Association**  
**8 April 2018**

**References:**

- 1 Buchwald D et al. (1996) Functional status in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome, other fatiguing illnesses, and healthy individuals. *American Journal of Medicine*, 101, 364 - 370
- 2 Komaroff A et al. (1996) Health status in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome and in the general population and disease comparison groups. *American Journal of Medicine*, 101, 281 - 290
- 3 Nacul LC et al. (2011) The functional status and well being of people with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome and their carers. *BMC Public Health*, 11, 402
- 4 Schweitzer R et al. (1995) Quality of life in chronic fatigue syndrome. *Social Science Medicine*, 41, 1367 – 1372
- 5 A Report of the Chief Medical Officer’s CFS/ME Working Group (2002), and separately its two published annexes, can be downloaded from The ME Association website at [www.meassociation.org.uk/about-the-mea/policies-and-documents/](http://www.meassociation.org.uk/about-the-mea/policies-and-documents/)