

UK-Mexico trade continuity agreement: exchange of notes

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Give your loved one a tax break this Valentine's Day

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is encouraging married couples and people in civil partnerships to sign up for a tax break this year.

Marriage Allowance offers individuals the chance to transfer part of their Personal Allowance to their husband, wife or civil partner, which could reduce their tax by up to £250 a year. For some couples, this could mean a backdated payment of up to four years of claims which could be as much as £1,188.

It is free to apply for Marriage Allowance and HMRC is encouraging customers to claim directly through its online portal to ensure they receive 100% of the tax relief they are eligible for.

Angela MacDonald, HMRC's Second Permanent Secretary, said:

For some, a tax break will be a welcome source of extra cash during these difficult times. I urge couples to take advantage of this offer, which could put up to £250 back in their pockets each year.

Signing up is simple – the quickest way to claim is through the GOV.UK website, just search 'marriage allowance'.

Marriage Allowance lets people earning £12,500 or less transfer up to £1,250 of their Personal Allowance to their husband, wife or civil partner – if

their income is higher and they are a basic rate taxpayer. This will reduce their tax by up to £250 for the 2020 to 2021 tax year. Claims can also be backdated to April 2016 until 5 April 2021. After 6 April 2021, couples will only be able to claim back to the 2017 to 2018 tax year.

The same criteria applies for people in married couples and civil partnerships in Scotland, except their partner must pay Income Tax at the starter, basic or intermediate rates between £12,501 and £43,430.

The Personal Allowance rate for the 2021 to 2022 tax year is increasing to £12,570.

Customers are urged to cut out the middle man, who may charge a fee, and receive a guaranteed 100% of their eligible entitlement by applying directly to HMRC via [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Marriage Allowance claims are automatically renewed every year. However, couples should notify HMRC if their circumstances change.

Marriage Allowance was introduced in April 2015.

Marriage Allowance is 10% of an individuals' tax-free Personal Allowance. The maximum amount that can be transferred to their husband, wife or civil partner is dependent on the Personal Allowance for that tax year.

Tax year Marriage Allowance amount

2020-21	£250
2019-20	£250
2018-19	£238
2017-18	£230
2016-17	£220

Show your vehicle some TLC in lockdown

This follows a new survey of the nation's drivers, revealing more than half (54%) did not know when their next service is due.

Nearly a third (32%) of road users admit they only carry out basic vehicle maintenance, such as checking their tyre pressure or oil levels, at best every few months or never. This is in spite of advice to perform regular vehicle maintenance – even when a vehicle is not in regular use during lockdown – on top of the recommended annual service and mandatory MOT.

People must stay at home during the lockdown except for the permitted reasons, but carrying out regular maintenance and checks will ensure vehicles are in good condition for when drivers are able to hit the road again.

In response to the survey, Highways England and partners – breakdown provider, Green Flag, and retailer, Halfords – are today spotlighting the importance of basic maintenance and checks in helping road users to avoid breakdowns or endangering themselves and other drivers. Without proper care and attention during lockdown, owners risk tyre problems, flat batteries, weather damage and issues due to fluid levels running low when they begin using their vehicle again.

Jeremy Phillips, head of road user safety, said:

While the country is still in lockdown, we want to remind drivers to act now and carry out those important basic checks. Doing regular maintenance, rather than waiting until the end of lockdown is in sight, will ensure their vehicles still work and preventable breakdowns are avoided when restrictions are lifted and the nation gets back on the road.

With the support of partners, Halfords and Green Flag, Highways England is committed to explaining the importance of carrying out vehicle checks even though drivers are restricted to essential travel only. A vehicle's condition can change while not in use.

Every year Highways England's traffic officers deal with more than 85,000 breakdowns – 40 per cent caused by vehicles running out of fuel, poor tyre maintenance, power loss and engine trouble. These basic checks and maintenance can prevent many breakdowns.

- Check tyres – check your tyre pressures are suitable for the load and their condition, including the spare. Always look out for cuts or wear and make sure tyres have a minimum tread depth of 1.6mm.
- Check fuel – before every journey, check your fuel levels and make sure you have enough to get to your destination. Always keep your tank at least one quarter full.
- Check engine oil – use your dipstick to check oil regularly. Top up if needed. Take your car to a garage if filling more than usual.
- Check screen wash – check your water is within the minimum and maximum markings. Always keep screen wash topped up so you can clear debris or dirt off your windscreen.
- Check lights – look at whether indicators, hazard lights, headlights, fog lights, reverse lights and brake lights are functioning properly.

Highways England has prepared a [written guide](#) showing road users how to carry out the five most important vehicle checks: tyres, engine oil, water, lights and fuel. Knowing the benefits of regular checks and maintenance before getting on the road is key to travelling safely.

Mark Newberry, commercial director at Green Flag, said:

Cars are designed to be driven regularly and the components rely on regular use to stay in tip-top condition. A period of lockdown

means many vehicles that may have been running every day could now be used less, which can lead to a number of complications.

Car batteries are often the hardest hit. During the first lockdown, over 60% of our callouts were for battery-related issues and the colder weather will also have an impact by reducing the battery's ability to hold charge.

Carry out a few basic checks to make sure your car is ready for when you need it. Don't leave it until your next MOT or service if you know or feel there is something wrong with your car. Although we will be there to recover you at the roadside – no-one wants to break down, especially in the cold dark winter months.

A Halfords spokesperson said:

At this time of year, colder weather and snowy spells introduce additional risks that all motorists should be guarding against. With the ongoing lockdown many of us will be using our cars less right now, and problems can often occur when vehicles are left unused on our drives. So, it's more important than ever to make checks every time you're setting off on those essential journeys.

Halfords is open as an essential retailer to help keep Britain moving, and we offer a free 5-point car check at our stores and garages nationwide. Our trained staff will check your lights, wipers, battery, windscreen and MOT status so you can be sure you're on the road safely, or have the Halfords team fix it for you if not.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

GARDP welcomes additional funding from

UK to develop new treatment for gonorrhoea

This investment, on top of £3.5 million committed in 2019, will support the Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP) in the development and availability of zolifludacin, a novel antibiotic, which is currently being assessed as part of a global phase 3 trial for safety and effectiveness as a treatment for gonorrhoea.

This new antibiotic has the potential to treat drug resistant gonorrhoea and is one of the few antibiotics in development specifically for the disease, an important consideration to ensure the treatment remains effective for generations to come.

Lord Bethell, Minister for Innovation, said:

Our investment to develop one of the few antibiotics to treat gonorrhoea shows our commitment to deliver medicines today which will change lives tomorrow. Supporting the fantastic work of GARDP shows our commitment to drive forward global health goals and cements the UK's place at the forefront of the fight against antimicrobial resistance.

Seamus O'Brien, GARDP Director of Research and Development, said:

We thank the UK for their increased contribution to GARDP and our work to develop a new treatment for gonorrhoea that is available to every person who needs it. Their support for our STI programme is critical for preventing the dire scenario of untreatable gonorrhoea and for the successful control of this infection.

Gonorrhoea is among the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs), with an estimated 87 million new cases occurring globally every year, and has been identified as posing a significant threat to global health by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Resistance to recommended treatments for gonorrhoea has emerged globally, including in the UK. Addressing drug-resistant infections is critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all. There is now an urgent need for new treatment options, particularly for people in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), who are hit hardest by the burden of this disease. GARDP will develop a strategy for access and appropriate use within LMICs that have a high number of cases of gonorrhoea.

Gonorrhoea can have severe consequences on public health and, when left

untreated, serious consequences for reproductive health as well as increased risk of transmission of HIV and other STIs. Women and vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected.

About the Global AMR Innovation Fund (GAMRIF)

The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) is the UK government department which is responsible for helping people to live more independent, healthier lives for longer. The partnership with GARDP is part of DHSC's [Global Antimicrobial Resistance Innovation Fund \(GAMRIF\)](#).

GAMRIF was established to provide seed funding for innovative research and development, specifically in neglected and underinvested areas, in the field of AMR. GAMRIF is a £50 million UK Aid investment, which means all projects funded must support research primarily and directly for the benefit of people in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

The fund takes a 'One Health' approach, seeking to invest in potential solutions to reduce the threat of AMR in humans, animals, fish and the environment. The fund seeks to leverage additional global funding through interaction with international government bodies, public-private partnerships, product development partnerships, global funding mechanisms and global fora.

About GARDP

The Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP) is a Swiss not-for-profit organisation developing new treatments for drug-resistant infections that pose the greatest threat to health.

GARDP was created by the WHO and the Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative (DNDi) in 2016 to ensure that everyone who needs antibiotics receives effective and affordable treatment. It aims to develop 5 new treatments by 2025 to fight drug-resistant infections.

GARDP is funded by the governments of Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom, as well as Médecins Sans Frontières and private foundations. GARDP is registered under the legal name GARDP Foundation.

[New Chair of the Commission on Human Medicines](#)

Press release

Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed has been appointed by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care as Chair of the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM).



Commission on Human Medicines

The CHM provides independent expert advice to ministers on the safety, quality and efficacy of medicines. It is an advisory non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

I am pleased to confirm Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed as Chair of the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM).

He provides a wealth of clinical experience and expertise in pharmacology, genetics and the safety of medicines. He will lead the CHM at a time when its role and profile continues to be critically important in its independent and scientific assessments of the safety, quality and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, as well as all other vaccines and medicines, to protect public health.

Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed said:

I am delighted to be appointed Chair of the CHM. The Commission is widely respected internationally for its work in licensing new medicines and monitoring their safety. Patient and public safety remains at the forefront of our work and I will make sure that the vital role we play in ensuring the medicines we take continue to meet the highest standards of safety, quality and efficacy.

Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed is a clinical pharmacologist and geneticist who currently holds the David Weatherall Chair in Medicine at the University of Liverpool and is a Consultant Physician at Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. Sir Munir holds the only NHS Chair of Pharmacogenetics in the UK, is Director of the Medical Research Council Centre for Drug Safety Sciences and Director of the Wolfson Centre for Personalised Medicine. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences and was until recently a CHM Commissioner and Vice Chair.

Notes to Editor

- Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed has been appointed as Chair of the Commission on Human Medicines for 4 years from 12 February 2021. He replaces Professor Stuart Ralston whose appointment ended on 11 February 2021.
- This appointment is made in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Governance for Public Appointments. The regulation of public appointments against the requirements of this Code is carried out by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.
- The appointments are made on merit and political activity played no part in the decision process. However, in accordance with the Code, there is a requirement for appointees' political activity (if any declared) to be made public. Sir Munir has not declared any political activity.
- The appointment will involve a time commitment of 33 days per year, including 11 meetings and any ad-hoc meetings based on need. Remuneration for the role will be up to £500 for the preparation required and attendance at each meeting.
- Professor Sir Munir Pirmohamed will continue in his role as chair of the CHM's COVID-19 Vaccines Benefit Risk Expert Working Group.
- [More information on the Commission for Human Medicines](#).

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