

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the SELF-DECLARATION MEDICAL SYSTEM FOR SPORTS DIVING

I have an existing Sport Diving Medical. Is it still valid and for how long?

A current Diving Medical is sufficient to identify that you are fit to dive and so is still valid until it Expires. When an existing medical runs out you **MUST** complete a self-declaration Medical or consult a Medical Referee should there be any questions. Should your current Diving Medical expire before your Membership renewal date then you should complete a self-declaration at that time and then again on your next and subsequent renewals.

If I answer 'Yes' to any of the questions on the form, what do I do and who do I speak to if I am unsure about whether an illness in the past will stop me diving?

The first thing to do is to telephone your local Medical Referee. Medical Referees are listed on the reverse of the Self-Declaration Form or you can check the UK Sports Diving Medical Committee's website or your Diving Organisation for the most up-to-date list of Referees.

From your initial telephone enquiry and the information you give to a Medical Referee they may:

- Say you can complete the self-declaration yourself.
- Need to contact your own doctor for further information and on this result, may endorse your self-declaration form. All this will involve is sending the Self-Declaration form to the Referee with a stamped addressed envelope for return of the endorsed form to you.
- Require you to visit them for a medical examination before a Certificate of Fitness to dive can be issued.

If a diver signs the Medical Self-Declaration Form stating that all is OK, but is hiding a past illness...

The Form is a legal declaration. If a diver is found to have been untruthful and an accident occurs then that diver may be uninsured and may be held individually liable for the consequences.

What if I have had DCI but been cleared to dive? or What if I have a condition listed on the Medical Self-Declaration Form but have been cleared to dive by a Medical Referee?

The Medical Referee will have issued you with a Certificate of Fitness to Dive. This certificate may cover a certain time period or be a clearance that self-declaration can be completed by the diver for the future. Provided the Medical Referee has given you the all clear, then there will not be a problem.

If I have a condition that warrants a visit to a Medical Referee, does that Referee keep my own doctor up to date?

The Medical Referee will usually give you a letter to take to your GP.

Where can I seek general medical advice?

Check the Medical standards on the BSAC/UKSDMC website, or contact your local Medical Referee.

Supposing different advice has been given from another medical source compared to a Medical Referee? Who should I approach to seek advice or clarification?

The UK Sport Diving Medical Committee is the final court of appeal for divers, and Referees are able to refer to the committee for advice.

What about the body mass index (BMI)?

There is no longer a cut-off. If you are able to complete the pool training then this is used as an indication of your fitness to dive. A high BMI does not necessarily reflect a poor level of fitness, just as a low BMI does not guarantee good fitness.

Isn't this just a means of Medical Referees now being able to charge?

The Medical Referees have diving medicine expertise and incur significant expense maintaining their knowledge, and also performing medicals or arranging investigation. Until recently many Referees did not charge for their time, but this is impossible to sustain because of the increasing number of referrals. Last year the British Medical Association suggested an initial consultation fee for this type of examination of £61.50.

How does the self-declaration affect my Diving insurance?

The diving organisation insurance companies have approved this change.

My GP didn't charge for medicals in the past, or low cost, so why the change? At least a doctor saw me for my diving medical?

You can continue to have medicals if you choose to do so, but you should not be falsely reassured by their screening value for diving fitness. You will still need to sign the self-declaration form annually.

My DO doesn't agree with the new proposal, will anyone from BSAC or SAA be able to help with updating and giving them more information?

A letter has been sent out from BSAC HQ to all Diving Officers explaining the change. Should the DO have any further questions they should contact their respective organization for a further response by their UK Sports Diving Medical Committee representative.

Isn't this decision because everyone else is looking at or accepting self-declarations?

The UKSDMC continually monitors the safety of diving in the UK and it is because of the ongoing research programme that this change has been proposed. The UKSDMC made the recommendation for self-declarations following evidence based research and with representatives from Scottish Sub Aqua, Sub Aqua Association and BSAC being involved. SSAC accepted the self declarations following the initial recommendation and the Sub Aqua Association did so at the same time as BSAC. The self declaration system will obviously continue to be monitored by the UKSDMC and, as a respected body of Diving medical specialists, they will continue to advise all the UK based organizations on medical matters.

Why do I have to go through a medical for a job, but not for diving, which is perceived as more dangerous?

Employment medicals follow a twofold requirement. Firstly it is to ensure that the employee is physically fit enough to carry out their job safely without representing a risk to either themselves or their colleagues. Secondly it is to cover any legal liability an employer may have for their employee's. Diving is potentially more hazardous than many jobs but these hazards are minimised by the training received and the advice of the UKSDMC is that the self declaration process will meet the necessary concerns for diver safety.

What about medical conditions such as high blood pressure, mental problems or substance abuse that may be missed by using self declarations

There have been instances of hypertensive divers developing acute pulmonary oedema (fluid on the lungs) from left ventricular failure when diving in cold water. This was mostly in the days of the neoprene wet suit. Now that dry suits are more common, this is no longer such a problem. In any case, the previous medical system did not prevent the occasional diver developing pulmonary oedema.

Mental problems significant in a diving context would normally be detected during training.

Substance abuse is a fact of life these days and a medical examination would not normally detect it. It should not be forgotten that by far the commonest drug to be abused is alcohol and the night in the pub before diving is often a silent contributing factor to diving accidents the following day.

Can I get hold of the paper referred to in the original UK Sports Diving Medical Committee's proposal?

This was published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine 2000; 34:375-378, "Medical supervision of sport diving in Scotland: reassessing the need for routine medical examinations" Glen S, White S and Douglas J. Copies can be obtained from the British Journal of Sports Medicine

What happens when I travel abroad and need a medical to dive (e.g. Malta)?

If diving abroad, please note a full diving medical may be required. Medical Form B, the original medical form, can be obtained from BSAC HQ and taken to the doctor conducting the examination.

Which countries currently require a Medical certificate signed by a doctor?

Those areas of the world which have been notified to BSAC HQ with having a requirement for a Diving Medical signed by a doctor are

The islands of Malta

Spain, including the Canaries and the Balearics.

Some islands of the Maldives

Australia (which requires an SPUMS medical)

Within these countries you may encounter variation in the application of these requirements. Equally you may find specific Dive Centres in other locations require a Medical signed by a doctor. Members would be well advised to check with the relevant dive operation before travelling.

I am a member of an overseas branch and local regulations require a doctor to sign a Diving Medical Certificate, what do I do as self-declaration will not be acceptable.

The Diving Medical Form B can be supplied by BSAC to overseas branches where local doctors need to sign. These forms give advice to the examining doctor should they need to contact a Medical Referee. The Self-Declaration form will still have to be signed annually.

There is not a Referee near me?

The UKSDMC are endeavouring to increase the number of Medical Referees. However, as with other medical specialists, if the need to visit a Medical Referee is required from initial telephone contact, travel may be necessary.

Can the DO be held liable if they miss something?

No, the completion of the self-declaration is the responsibility of the person completing the form. However, if a DO feels they need to speak to a medical diving specialist on a query or for advice, they should contact either a Medical Referee or the UKSDMC.

Shouldn't anyone partaking in a physical sport be health conscious as a matter of course?

As with all sports, the participants should be generally fit to partake in that sport. Health is an individual's responsibility but any questions of concern that relate to health and diving can be directed to the UKSDMC or a Medical Referee.

How long is the Self-Declaration Form valid for?

The self-declaration is valid for one year, unless there is a significant change in your health. For ease of administration the BSAC have tied the self-declaration in with the annual Membership renewals and so Members should complete the self-declaration at the time they renew. New members would complete the self-declaration at the time they join the BSAC and then at subsequent renewals.

Can I choose to have an 'old' style Medical with my GP instead of Self-Declaration?

The requirement to meet the BSAC Medical Fitness to Dive is now for completion of a Medical Self-Declaration. Whilst you may choose to have a Medical anyway this does not replace the self-declaration process. It may be that when you consult with a Referee that they would accept a full medical from another doctor as meeting their requirements but this should be checked with a Referee first.

I am a member of BSAC Direct. Who do I send my Medical Self-Declaration to?

You should keep the form yourself (in a safe place) and return a copy with your membership renewal to BSAC HQ. This then provides a back up copy should you lose your original. If you would have answered 'yes' to any of the questions you will still need to contact a Medical Referee in the usual way and follow any advice they give you.

Diving Officers in ordinary Branches take responsibility for the Members of their Branch and so need to be able to ensure that they are fit to dive and remain so and also to protect themselves against liability for allowing someone who is unfit to dive.

BSAC Direct is a means for people to maintain their membership of BSAC without access to a Branch. Any diving would be either on an individual or privately organised basis and it is not possible for the DO to determine if someone is fit or not. By accepting Membership of the BSAC we all agree to be bound by the rules and regulations of the BSAC and one of these (5 D) relates to the need to meet Medical Requirements as laid down by Council. The return of a copy of your Self-declaration to HQ is purely for the purpose of a back up record.

Can the Diving Officer request a fitness test?

Yes the D.O. can carry out a simple test in the pool. The initial swimming evaluation forms just such an effective test. Alternatively the member could be referred to his or her own GP for a fitness test.

I am a Life Member of the BSAC. Who will remind me that I need to complete a Self-Declaration every 12 months?

If your Branch has a common renewal date then the simplest way will be to complete the self-declaration form at that time together with the rest of your Branch. Otherwise July 1st each year has been chosen as the date on which you should complete a self-declaration. Prior to this date each year the Membership department will notify all Life Members of the need to renew their Self-Declaration and this notification will include a copy of the declaration form.

What happens if new questions arise?

This List of Frequently Asked Questions will continue to be updated with any new Questions as and when they arise. If you have any questions not covered in this document please contact BSAC HQ technical@bsac.com