SNOMED CT frequently asked questions

What is SNOMED CT?

SNOMED CT:

- Is an international vocabulary of clinical phrases for use in healthcare systems.
- Is the most comprehensive, multilingual clinical healthcare terminology in the world.
- Is a meaning-based terminology.
- Has scientifically validated clinical content.
- Enables consistent, processable representation of clinical content in electronic health records.
- Is mapped to other international standards.
- Is already used in more than fifty countries.
- Can be used in software applications to represent clinically relevant information consistently, reliably and comprehensively, supporting the development of high-quality clinical content in health records.
- Provides a standardised way to represent and automatically interpret clinicians' clinical phrases.

Why are Read codes changing to SNOMED CT codes?

Currently, two vocabularies for clinical systems are in use in primary care: Read v2 and CTV3. Using a single vocabulary nationally across all healthcare systems for data sharing, reporting, management and clinical decision support will make it easier to support improvements to patient care.

When will use of SNOMED CT start in England?

EMIS Health are delivering a phased approach for the implementation of SNOMED CT.

The implementation for SNOMED CT in EMIS Web has already begun. Testing for Phase 1 with NHS Digital has been completed and the minor changes it brings are present in version 8.2 of EMIS Web.

The deadline for SNOMED CT use across all clinical systems in NHS England is April 2020.

I'm in a Scottish/Welsh/Northern Ireland practice. Will I get SNOMED CT in April 2018?

Updates for these nations will follow. Each national authority (NSS, NWIS and BSO) is responsible for initiating the transition to SNOMED CT, and EMIS Health will work with them to deliver a smooth transition to SNOMED CT.

I'm a community/clinical services user. When will SNOMED CT come into my clinical system?

Secondary Care, Acute Care, Mental Health, Community systems, Dentistry and other systems used in direct patient care must use SNOMED CT as the clinical terminology before April 2020.

What happens if we have care record sharing agreements, and when we receive SNOMED CT, another organisation we have an agreement with is still on Read v2?

We have taken steps to ensure that there is minimal impact to organisations with care record sharing agreements, even when one organisation may be using SNOMED CT and the other Read v2.

When data is displayed in EMIS Web (whether via a sharing agreement or otherwise), it is done using the code's term as it was at the point of data entry, rather than by looking up the term for the clinical codes from a coding dictionary. This guarantees firstly that if a code's term changes, the original meaning of the clinical record cannot be lost, but also that when displaying data using codes that are not understood by the receiving system, the data will continue to display correctly.

What SNOMED CT training will be available?

We are currently providing free online training sessions on 'Introducing SNOMED CT' which you can sign up to here.

We're also providing written guides in using SNOMED CT in EMIS Web which you can view here. We'll be adding more guides and information to these pages as the implementation continues.

NHS Digital also provides training resources on SNOMED CT:

Webinars from NHS Digital, join or listen to a recording

How will I find and select the correct SNOMED CT codes? I've never used them before.

In EMIS Web, you'll use a code picker to search for the correct SNOMED CT code, in a similar way to searching for a Read code. If you prefer, you can search on a clinical term or historic equivalent Read code.

What areas of EMIS Web will SNOMED CT affect?

All areas of EMIS Web that use clinical codes will be affected to some extent, but the main areas affected are:

- Care Record
- Searches and reports
- Templates
- Concepts
- Protocols
- Extract services (PDES and GPES)
- Risk stratification tools (for example, QDiabetes, QRisk, QCancer and QAdmissions)
- GP2GP
- Summary Care Record (SCR)
- Electronic Referral Service (eRS)

Will my searches, templates, concepts and protocols that use Read codes pick up the new SNOMED CT equivalent/mapped codes, or will I need to rewrite them?

Your local existing templates, searches, reports, protocols and concepts will continue to work in SNOMED CT, but any hierarchies contained within will run based on Read v2 hierarchies until they have been reviewed and edited. Once edited, they will run based on SNOMED CT hierarchies. Any obsolete codes within these will be flagged so that you can review and replace as needed.

EMIS Health authored content (templates, concepts, protocols and searches) will be converted by us to use the SNOMED CT terms and hierarchies.

What will happen to QOF and other searches and extracts with national business rules (for example, the national diabetes audit)?

The national teams for QOF, enhanced services and Public Health England will provide all business rules in SNOMED CT from now on. All data extracts will be dual coded from April 2018 onwards.

How will SNOMED CT affect what patients see when viewing their online record?

If your organisation has enabled coded record access, patients will be able to see the same SNOMED CT terms that EMIS Web users see.

We use some partner products which extract or import Read coded data from EMIS Web. Will these still work?

Yes, most partner products will continue to work. Only three of the 70+ partner products that exchange coded data with EMIS Web may need development work to make sure they continue to work with SNOMED CT from April 2018: ScriptSwitch, Optimise Rx and Map of Medicine. These suppliers are working closely with the EMIS Health Partners and Alliances Team to prepare fully for SNOMED CT from April 2018.

What happens if a partner product imports a Read code after I have started to use SNOMED CT codes?

EMIS Web will automatically map the Read code to the appropriate SNOMED CT code from the maps that NHS Digital has provided.

Can I choose to continue to use Read codes?

No, SNOMED CT codes will replace Read codes. You'll still be able to type old Read codes in the SNOMED CT code picker in EMIS Web if you prefer, and EMIS Web will then display the mapped equivalent SNOMED CT code for selection.

Will the Read codes I added to EMIS Web before transition be converted to SNOMED CT codes, or will they remain as Read codes?

Existing patient data recorded in Read v2 will not be converted to SNOMED CT codes. The data will be

stored with its originally entered Read term used at the point of entry plus a mapped SNOMED CT term.

When SNOMED CT is first switched on in EMIS Web, you'll only add new data as SNOMED CT codes, but it will be recorded as both Read codes and SNOMED CT codes for the benefit of any systems that haven't yet moved to SNOMED CT. During this time only a subset of SNOMED CT (known as the GP subset) will be available in EMIS Web, to allow this 'dual coding'.

Searches written in SNOMED CT will run across all data in the system, i.e. SNOMED CT codes and pre-existing Read codes that have been mapped to an equivalent SNOMED CT code.

What will happen to local codes and EMIS codes?

These will remain in place if there is no equivalent SNOMED CT code, but many EMIS national codes that were created more recently are already mapped to their SNOMED CT equivalents. You can read more about this here.

How do I request new codes?

Although you cannot currently add codes which are present in SNOMED CT only, you can request such codes to be added as EMIS national codes (mapped to SNOMED CT) prior to the release of SNOMED CT. This way you can use the codes before the full release. Once SNOMED CT is released the codes will simply map over. Guidance on requesting a code can be viewed here.

If you need to request a new SNOMED CT code, contact information.standards@hscic.gov.uk.

Will SNOMED CT be the only coding scheme in use, or will other systems continue to be used?

All GPSoC systems (which include EMIS Web, Vision, TPP and Microtest) will use SNOMED CT coding only following the implementation.

What will happen to pathology codes?

The current Pathology Bounded Code List (PBCL) consists of Read codes that have been mapped to SNOMED CT codes. We expect that editions of the PBCL issued after April 2018 will be defined in SNOMED CT codes directly.
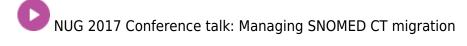
Will we be able to run MIQUEST queries after moving to SNOMED CT?

Yes, MIQUEST queries will still be available but restricted only to codes that have a map to Read v2. A warning message will be displayed in the module to confirm this.

Useful links for NUG members

NUG 2017 Conference talk: Managing SNOMED CT migration

NUG 2017 Spring conference talk: A beginner's guide to SNOMED CT

Related content

- EMIS Health implementation update
- Read code to SNOMED CT
- Get ready for SNOMED CT
- NHS Digital SNOMED CT Browser
- Mapping database for SNOMED CT codes and terms
- NHS Digital webinars