

DO YOU RECOGNISE THIS SYMBOL?

The red cross emblem – a red cross with arms of equal length on a white background – is one of the most recognised symbols in the world.

However, its true meaning is often not well understood. If asked, many people in the UK would probably say that the red cross is a first aid or medical sign.

In fact, first and foremost, the red cross emblem is a special sign of neutrality and protection in armed conflict. It is used to safeguard the wounded and sick and those who care for them. As such, the primary users are the medical services of the armed forces. The emblem shows that a person or object is protected under the 1949 Geneva Conventions (international humanitarian law).

The secondary purpose of the emblem is to indicate that the person or object on which it is displayed is connected with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which includes the British Red Cross.

The emblem must be completely trusted to signify neutrality and protection, which is why its use is restricted by international and national law. If the red cross emblem or similar signs are used for other purposes, no matter how beneficial or inconsequential they may seem, the special significance of the emblem will be diminished.

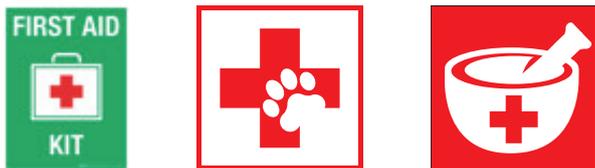
The red crescent and red crystal emblems have exactly the same meaning as the red cross emblem and have equal status under international and national law.



Misuse of the red cross emblem

In the UK, the most common forms of misuse of the red cross occur in the health, medical, pharmaceutical and retail sectors and usually relate to first aid or health care products or services.

Examples of **misuse** of the red cross emblem include:



Designs similar to the red cross emblem are also restricted. Please do **NOT** use:



The Swiss heraldic emblem (a white cross on a red background)

Examples of imitations of the red cross emblem

Other signs that **can be used** instead of the red cross:



Pharmacy

FIRST AID

Official sign for first aid

Star of Life (often used on ambulances and by paramedics)



Aesculapius (the traditional sign of the medical profession)



The law in the UK: the Geneva Conventions Act 1957 (as amended)

International humanitarian law requires States to regulate the use of the protective emblems and names.

In the UK, under the 1957 Geneva Conventions Act it is a crime to use the emblem without the authority of the Secretary of State for Defence. Use by any civilian person or organisation other than the British Red Cross is a misuse.

The Act also restricts use of:

- > the red crescent emblem (a red crescent on a white background)
- > the red crystal emblem (a red frame, in the shape of a square on edge)
- > the Swiss heraldic emblem (a white cross on a red background)
- > designs resembling the above emblems
- > the words "Red Cross", "Red Crescent" or "Red Crystal"

None of these emblems or similar designs is able to be registered as a trademark.

The role of the British Red Cross

As part of the privilege to use the red cross emblem, and as a humanitarian auxiliary to the public authorities, the British Red Cross has a recognised role to play in monitoring unauthorised use of the red cross emblem and similar designs in the UK.

The British Red Cross assists the UK government departments responsible for implementation of the 1957 Geneva Conventions Act:

- > The Ministry of Defence (for the red cross, red crescent and red crystal emblems and names)
- > The Intellectual Property Office (for the Swiss heraldic emblem and designs closely resembling the red cross, red crescent or red crystal and similar wording)

The British Red Cross also works with other government departments to help protect additional emblems established under international law. These include the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for the cultural emblem (the blue shield) and the Cabinet Office for the international distinctive sign of civil defence.



The cultural emblem

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact:

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Thank you for helping to protect the integrity of the red cross and other protective emblems.

This publication has been approved by the Ministry of Defence and the Intellectual Property Office. The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949) and Scotland (SC037738).
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