

A message from the NHS General Dental Services

NHS General Dental Services are operating at significantly reduced capacity due to social distancing and infection prevention and control requirements in light of the COVID-19 pandemic as set out by the Chief Dental Officer for England and Public Health England.

Dental services were not permitted to see patients for face to face care at the start of the pandemic. This has led to a backlog of unmet need, delayed and suspended treatments.

Most dental practices are open and able to safely provide a full range of treatments but are having to prioritise patients with urgent need and delayed treatments over routine and non-urgent dental care.

Most dental practices have to have up to one hour gaps between patients if they are providing treatments, to maintain a safe environment for patients and staff. This means that available appointments are in short supply. If you are unable to make your appointment please let the practice know as soon as possible as they may be able to book in another patient who has been waiting for care.

All patients should call the dental practice for triage and advice if seeking dental care. The practice will then either provide advice or make an appointment if treatment is necessary. If the practice has capacity and the issue is not urgent you may be offered a routine appointment, though this will vary from practice to practice based on their capacity and existing patient need.

While general dental services were closed treatments were only accessible from urgent dental care centres, accessed by patients calling NHS 111 and being referred by the dental triage service. These services are still in operation. If you do not routinely attend a practice, have an urgent need and are unable to find a local practice which has capacity then you may be directed by a dental practice to call NHS 111 to speak to the dental triage service. If the triage service finds the

issue is urgent they will arrange an appointment at the urgent dental care centre. If you require more complex treatments that cannot be provided by your dentist, such as some root canal treatments, these may be further delayed as the services that general dental practitioners refer into are also managing a backlog of patients from when they were closed and an increase of new patients whose oral health care was not managed while practices were closed.

In summary

- If you need urgent dental care and do not routinely attend a dental practice and are having trouble finding one which has appointments call NHS 111 (please note you will be assessed over the phone and only if you are in pain and need urgent dental care will be booked into service closest to your location)
- Call your practice before attending in person and let your practice know if you are unable to make your appointment
- If you are seeking a routine appointment this may not be possible: patients in pain or at risk of losing teeth will be prioritised
- If you are self-isolating or have symptoms of COVID-19 and your dental need is urgent please call NHS 111, do not attend a dental practice
- Please be patient with your dental team, we are working to ensure that care is provided in a safe environment and that those with the highest need are prioritised