

NHS Dental Services

NHS dental patient registration ceased in 2006 and since then practices are only responsible for the care of the patient whilst they are under a course of treatment, have another issue within two months or have an item under guarantee. In effect this means patients are not guaranteed access to an NHS dental appointment at that practice in the future. Practices do not have an obligation to see the patient again after that course or treatment is completed but must have a reasonable justification for not being able to see the patient.

You will be aware that routine dental services are being restored following closure due to Covid-19. However, these are based on clinical need as set out by national guidance that the sequencing and scheduling of patients for treatment as services resume, should take into account and consider:

- The urgency of need;
- The particular un-met needs of vulnerable groups; and
- Available capacity to undertake activity.

NHS dentists are following the advice of the Chief Dental Officer which is to prioritise urgent cases and those with outstanding treatments. Therefore, very few dental practices have the capacity to see routine examinations at the moment. Due to Covid-19 restrictions and the difficulties Covid-19 presents for dental care, the day-to-day capacity of dental practices is significantly reduced, and this is reflected in their contractual requirements which is determined nationally.

The provision of NHS dental services across the country has been limited since the 8th June and dental practices are currently providing a minimum of 60% of their activity in return for being financially remunerated at their normal pre-Covid value in accordance with national guidelines.

Patients requiring both urgent and routine NHS dental care can access services from any dental practice holding an NHS dental contract. Please note that dental practices are independent providers who hold a contract to provide NHS dental services. Dental providers manage their own practice including capacity and determine whether they are able to accept additional/new patients and therefore their lists can open and close on a frequent basis.

In addition, for those patients experiencing pain and/or discomfort who may require urgent dental care, urgent dental centres (UDCs) can be accessed via NHS111.