

NHS England - Yorkshire and the Humber - Barnsley Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Dentistry

1. Background

NHS England (Yorkshire and the Humber) is responsible for the commissioning and contracting of all NHS dental services across South Yorkshire & Bassetlaw (SY&B). Commissioned dental activity is based on Courses of Treatment (CoT) and Units of Dental Activity (UDAs). Depending on the complexity of the treatment, each CoT represents a given number of UDAs. Dental services are:

- Primary care (general high street dentistry)
- Community Dental Services (CDS)
- Orthodontics
- Urgent care
- Secondary care

1.1 Key Challenges

- Access/inequalities: NHS England inherited a range of contracts, from Primary Care Trusts, when it was established and these 'legacy' arrangements mean that there is inconsistent, and often inequitable, access to dental services, both in terms of capacity in primary care and of complex and inconsistent pathways to urgent dental care, community dental services and secondary care.
- Primary care national contract: rolled out in 2006, this is held by a General Dental Practice (GDP) in perpetuity (subject to any performance concerns), with little flexibility for either the commissioner or the provider.
- Procurement: procurement rules introduce further challenges to levers to change to commissioning arrangement; it is not possible to introduce innovative ways of working without testing the market.

2. Dental Provision in Barnsley

NHS England commissions a total of 487,492 Units of Dental Activity across the 29 dental practices in Barnsley. A number of additional services are commissioned by NHS England for Barnsley residents including orthodontics, hospital services (provided by Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (BFT), community dental services (provided by Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust) and urgent care; accessed via NHS111.

3. Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid-19 has impacted, and continues to impact, on NHS dental services. There have been a number of changes, since March 2020, to manage services safely through the COVID-19 outbreak for patients and clinicians alike.

At the end of March 2020, following advice from the Chief Dental Officer, dentists were asked to stop routine treatment and provide remote consultations and triage. An urgent dental care system was established to ensure that patients, who were in pain, could access remote triage

and then (face to face) treatment where it was clinically necessary and appropriate. Since 8 June 2020, dental practices have been able to re-open, to resume NHS dental services in accordance with advice set out by the Chief Dental Officer and Public Health England. However, to ensure that clinicians and patients are safe, all practices must follow the stringent infection prevention and control measures published by the Chief Dental Officer and Public Health England. This is impacting on the level of service that can be delivered by dentists and is as low as one-fifth of the activity that was being delivered prior to Covid at some practices. All dental practices are expected to follow the guidance outlined in Standard Operating Procedures, including:

- Being open for face to face care unless there are specific circumstances which prevent it.
- To prioritise patients with urgent care needs. NHS England advice is that the sequencing and scheduling of patients should take into account the urgency of needs; the particular unmet needs of vulnerable groups and practices' available capacity to undertake activity.
- Patients requiring an urgent appointment should be offered an appointment, whether or not they have been treated on the NHS previously at the practice.
- An expectation that priority must be given to patients in pain, irrespective of whether they are new patients or not to a practice, over the provision of routine dental care.

The latest stakeholder communication – October 2021 is also available at Appendix A.

3.1 Impact on patients

Practices are prioritising urgent dental care for those patients who require immediate attention. In addition, they are also prioritising the health and safety of both patients and staff. The nature of the treatments involved means adhering to strict infection control procedures between appointments, this reduces the number of patients that are able to be treated on a daily basis.

The other impact is on those patients wishing to resume their routine dental check-ups and treatments. Practices have been asked to prioritise those patients with an urgent or emergency dental need. Therefore, patients requiring routine dental care such as check-ups and scale and polish will inevitably experience longer waiting times.

3.2 Current advice on accessing urgent dental advice/treatment

- Anyone with an urgent dental issue should telephone their dental practice (or any NHS practice if they don't have a regular dentist) for advice on what to do next.
- They will be triaged first over the telephone. If they need face to face care, they will be given an appointment and encouraged to attend as long as they do not have any COVID-19 symptoms.
- Anyone requiring treatment is given clear instructions by the dental practice on what they need to do prior to their face-to-face appointment and arrival at the practice.
- If after telephone triage the clinician decides the issue is not deemed urgent, the patient may be given advice on how to self-manage their dental problem. They will be advised to make contact again if their situation changes.

4. Resumption – General Overview

The focus of NHS England’s dental commissioning team is to support providers to resume services, in line with Standard Operating Procedures and IPC guidance.

Primary Care

All primary care providers are open and providing services outlined in national Standard Operating Procedures. Urgent care is the priority for all dental care at this time and there are 2 ways of accessing care, i.e. via a high street dentist or via NHS111.

Community Dental Services – Rotherham Community Dental Service continue to provide face to face treatments.

Orthodontics – Due to the pandemic, routine dental services, including orthodontics, were closed for several weeks in line with government policy at the end of March 2020. From 8 June 2020, dental practices and orthodontists began to reopen to provide face to face appointments.

Secondary Care – Barnsley Hospital NHS FT dental specialties (paediatrics, oral surgery, orthodontics, oral medicine, oral microbiology and maxillofacial and restorative) and continue to provide care. The Trusts have reported that services have recommenced and that they are accepting new referrals which are clinically triaged, and a prioritisation model is in place.

5. Communicating with the public

NHS England has been posting messages on social media platforms on a weekly basis. An example of these (local) posts are shown below.

Tweet: Please be aware that dentists are currently still prioritising vulnerable patients or those with urgent dental needs; it is therefore unlikely that routine dental care such as dental check-ups will be available at this time. #helpushelpyou

OPEN Accessing dental care **NHS**

Dental Practices are open, however practices will need to prioritise patients with the most urgent need.

If you need help from a dentist:

- Contact your regular dentist or if you do not have one, call any NHS dental practice
- You will be given advice or offered an appointment if appropriate.
- For urgent dental care, out of hours or at weekends that cannot wait, please ring NHS111

Please do not visit your dental practice unless you've been advised to. This will ensure the practice can continue to provide essential care safely.

Report prepared by:

Debbie Stovin

Dental Commissioning Manager, NHS England and NHS Improvement – North East and Yorkshire (Yorkshire and the Humber)

Date: 22nd October 2021

October 2021 – Stakeholder Update No.4
COVID-19: Resumption of dental services

This is our most recent stakeholder bulletin which aims to keep you up to date with the current situation regarding the resumption of dental services across our region, which like everywhere in the country have been severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The dental sector faced particular challenges during the pandemic, due to the proximity between a dental professional and a patient's airway and the relatively high proportion of aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) undertaken. In dentistry, AGPs are when treatment involves the use of a high-speed drill.

During the first wave of the pandemic, in the interest of patient and dental staff safety, routine and regular dental services were paused and urgent dental centres (UDCs) were established to ensure patients who were in dental pain could access dental services.

All practices reopened for provision of face to face care between July and September 2020 and whilst the NHS contractual expectation is that all NHS funded capacity is used to safely deliver the maximum possible volume of care for patients, revised contractual targets have been in place since July 2020, which outline the requirements on dental practices to deliver a proportion of their normal activity volumes. Activity levels have increased since then and from 1 October 2021 the minimum expectation is for practices to be delivering 65% of their contracted appointments. However, it will be some months before dental services return to providing care in a similar manner and to the activity levels that patients previously experienced. It is also dependent on the further easing of COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures which is being led nationally. Given this reduction in the number of available appointments, there is a significant backlog of unmet need, delayed and suspended treatments.

Practices have been asked to continue to prioritise patients with the greatest need into their available NHS treatment capacity, those requiring urgent dental care and vulnerable patients are prioritised, which likely means a delay for patients seeking an appointment for non-urgent treatment. NHS England continues to support dental providers across the region to resume regular NHS dental services safely and effectively and in accordance with the advice set out by the Chief Dental Officer.

Across Yorkshire and the Humber there are some localities where patients have had historical and continuing problems accessing NHS dentistry and plans were being developed to increase capacity and look at alternative ways of providing care in these areas. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily delayed progressing with this. Once the NHS emerges safely from the on-going Covid-19 pandemic our intention is to continue with this work to improve general access and reduce inequalities, where possible.

It is important to remember that unlike general medical services patients do not 'register' with a dentist and it is not a requirement for a patient to be on a specific practice's list to access NHS dental care.

Many NHS dental practices also offer private appointments which, as independent contractors, they are at liberty to do. Mixed practices, offering both NHS and private treatment, tend to have separate appointment books for both NHS and private treatment, with staff teams often employed to provide these different arrangements. NHS provision must be

available across the practice's contracted opening hours and demand for NHS treatment is such that they could have used up their available NHS appointments and practices may, therefore, offer private appointments to patients.

At this time, we are asking patients for their understanding and co-operation during this unprecedented and difficult period of time for the NHS.

Current impact on patients

NHS England recognises that people may be experiencing difficulties accessing dental services. Practices are providing services in line with standard operating procedures issued by the Chief Dental Officer and Public Health England which means the level of appointments they are able to provide has significantly reduced. It is therefore necessary for dental practices to triage patients who contact them to ensure that patients with the greatest clinical need, ie those requiring urgent dental care and vulnerable patients are prioritised, which likely means a delay for patients seeking non-urgent and more routine dental care such as check's ups.

Progression to resume the full range of routine dental care is being risk-managed by practices themselves and they should be seeing patients with the most urgent issues first, followed by those that have open courses of treatment, with a return to a full routine dentistry, such as check-ups and recalls, following in due course when they have capacity to provide this. We continue to work with our NHS dental providers to explore opportunities to increase the clinical treatment capacity available within the constraints of the Covid pandemic and infection prevention and control measures to ensure that care can be delivered safely for both patients and staff.

The current advice to patients is:

- If your teeth and gums are healthy – a check-up, or scale and polish may not be needed for up to 24 months
- When you come into the surgery for an appointment, please remember that social distancing remains in place and you will still need to wear a face mask upon entering the practice.
- The infection control process for dentistry has not changed with the lifting of COVID19 restrictions – masks and hand hygiene measures are still required.
- It's important that dental practices continue to follow this guidance as they are a healthcare setting and they are doing all they can to ensure your safety when you come to the practice.
- Every dental practice is working extremely hard to provide care to patients within the restrictions and guidance – please be respectful at all times.
- All NHS dental practices are following the guidance, and private dental practices are recommended to follow them by the health regulator, the Care Quality Commission.
- Similar public health measures are still in place for hospitals and GP practices too. Advice is that the infection prevention control measures in dentistry should continue to be followed until further notice
- Dental practices will continue to have restrictions on leaving time between patients to ventilate rooms – this has an impact on how many patients they are able to see each day.
- All dental practices are prioritising patients for treatment based on urgency and priority groups, such as those more at risk of dental disease or children.

Our previous messages are also still in place:

- Please only visit your practice if you have an appointment and telephone to book an appointment only if essential – dentists are currently prioritising the vulnerable or those with the most urgent need.
- Appointments for some routine treatments, such as dental check-ups, may be delayed.
- Your practice will look a little different than usual as they will be operating in a way that observes COVID-19 social distancing and hygiene rules to ensure everyone's safety.
- If you develop an urgent dental issue telephone your regular dental practice (or any NHS practice if you don't have a regular dentist) for advice on what to do next.
- Dental issues will be triaged over the telephone, initially. If the dentist thinks that you need face to face care, you will be given an appointment at the practice and advised to attend as long as you do not have any COVID-19 symptoms.
- Anyone clinically triaged as requiring treatment will be given clear instructions by the practice on what they need to do prior to their appointment and once they get to the practice.
- If after a telephone triage the clinician decides the issue is not urgent, you may be given advice on how to self-manage the dental problem. You will be advised to make contact again if your situation changes/worsens
- We know you would like to be able to make an appointment for routine dental care but please be understanding of the current situation with regards to the prioritisation of those with urgent needs and be respectful of the clinical decisions taken by the practices.

For out of hours care:

- Toothache should initially be managed with over the counter pain relief until an appointment can be made with your general dental practice. A pharmacist can advise you what is the best pain control to meet your needs.
- Lost fillings, crowns or bridges, broken teeth or braces are not usually deemed to be clinically urgent and patients are advised to contact their local dental practice when they re-open.
- Only ring NHS 111 out of hours when your dental needs cannot be met by self-care and cannot wait till your practice is open to contact them for advice.

Communicating with the public

Please find below a number of tweets/Facebook messages and a digital asset that you may share on your own social media accounts etc.

- **Tweet:** Dental practices are safe and open for face to face care, but it is not 'business as usual'.
- **Tweet:** You will still be required to wear a face mask when you visit a dental practice and follow strict hand hygiene. Please be respectful of the guidance and dental teams at all times.
- **Tweet:** The dentist is best placed to clinically assess dental issues. If your dental issue is deemed non-urgent, we would ask that you don't then call 111 for a second opinion leaving 111 staff free to deal with other patients with urgent health issues.
- **Tweet:** Please be aware that dentists are currently still prioritising vulnerable patients or those with urgent dental needs; it is therefore unlikely that routine dental care such as dental check-ups will be available at this time. #helpushelpyou
- **Tweet:** Please note that appointments for some routine dental treatments, such as dental check-ups, are limited at this time as dentists prioritise vulnerable patients and those with urgent dental needs. #helpushelpyou
- **Tweet:** Only ring NHS111 out of hours should you require urgent dental care – please note that lost fillings, crowns or bridges, broken teeth or braces are not deemed to be

clinically urgent and patients are advised to contact their local dental practice when they re-open.

- **Tweet:** Toothache should initially be managed with over the counter pain relief until an appointment can be made with your general dental practice – if you don't have a regular dentist call your nearest NHS dental practice. #helpushelpyou

Digital Asset



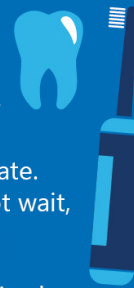
Accessing dental care



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