

NHS primary care dentistry - recovery

Background

On 25 March 2020, NHS England wrote to NHS dental practices setting out immediate changes to services due to the overriding need to limit transmission of COVID-19. These included:

NHS dental practices were expected to provide telephone advice and triage. All dental practices were responsible for triaging patients who contact the practice seeking access to urgent dental care regardless of whether they were considered 'regular' patients of the practice. A network of urgent dental centres were put in place in Leeds to ensure that where patients had been triaged for face to face treatment, it was possible to provide this.

On 28 May 2020, the Government announced that dental practices could begin to reopen from 8 June 2020 and start to provide a limited range of face to face treatment. Practices needed to assess that they had the necessary infection prevention control and PPE requirements in place alongside urgent telephone advice and triage currently operating.

Current position

NHS England – Yorkshire and the Humber is actively supporting dentistry to resume NHS dental services safely and effectively and in accordance with advice set out by the Chief Dental Officer.

There are 86 dental practices in Leeds and all, with the exception of 1, are now providing the limited range of face to face services. This one practice is not opening due to being a single-handed contract holder with health issues but they have made buddying up arrangements for local practices to see urgent patients.

Although practices have restarted some face to face treatments, advice is that the sequencing and scheduling of patients for treatment as services resume should take into account the urgency of needs, the particular unmet needs of vulnerable groups and available capacity to undertake activity. Progression to resumption of the full range of routine dental care will be risk-managed by the individual practice. We anticipate that in resuming services, practices in Leeds will be seeing those with the most urgent issues first and a return to services fully providing routine dental check-ups and hygienist appointments will come later. Advice for the public explains how services will look different as dentists begin to resume services. Resumption of services in a similar manner to that which was previously experienced may be dependent on the further easing of COVID-19 control measures.

As we support practices to resume services, urgent dental centres will remain in operation across the region to provide urgent dental treatment particularly where practices have not yet resumed face to face care. Referral to the urgent dental centres remains the same, either via the dental practice or 111.

Advice for the public:



Dental practices will look different as they will be operating in a way that observes COVID-19 social distancing and hygiene rules, as part of measures taken to ensure the safety patients and the dental team alike.

Whilst we are observing social distancing, patients should continue to telephone or email their practice, rather than attending in person without an appointment.

If you have a regular dentist, you should call them as a first step. The dentist will assess your situation over the phone, including giving advice and, if needed, prescriptions for painkillers or antibiotics, or arranging treatment.

If a patient does not have a regular dentist during the COVID-19 outbreak, they can still call any local dental practice as well as visiting [111.nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) or call NHS 111 who will provide advice as appropriate.

Out of hours for urgent dental issues the advice still remains to visit [NHS111.nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) or call NHS 111. Patients should not be visiting A&E departments or GPs with dental problems.

The range of treatments offered may be different to that being offered prior to 25 March 2020 and may vary from practice to practice. This will depend on the staff and equipment available to the team at the time. The dental team may also be wearing different protective equipment to what you are used to seeing.

Next steps

Locally, as there has been no change to the contract form for primary care providers, there is little scope to change service provision. NHS England remains committed to the local strategic aims, which are to improve access and inequalities across the region, improve oral health and ensure value for money. Work will continue to develop the approach to flexible commissioning and this strategic direction will continue to be the focus but at this time the emphasis is on supporting practices to re-open and provide as wide a range of services as soon as it is practicable and safe to do so.

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