

All Midlands Stakeholders

December 2020

Dear Stakeholder,

### **Access to NHS Dental Services during the Christmas and New Year period**

Although tiered restrictions in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic may differ according to where someone lives, dental practices will continue to provide services over the Christmas and New Year period, although opening hours for individual practices may vary.

Most practices are now providing face to face care, with the majority offering aerosol-generating (AGP) procedures (treatments involving the use of powered instruments like drills or scalers) by using enhanced infection control measures and PPE. In addition, Urgent Dental Care Centres continue to provide urgent care for those patients who do not have access to a regular dentist or whose dentist is not yet offering the full range of services.

Enhanced infection control and social distancing measures mean that the capacity for dental practices to see patients is currently still very restricted, with the management of urgent patients and those in vulnerable groups remaining the priority.

Any dental practices operating reduced hours during the festive period or opting to close on some days, remain responsible for their patients and must ensure that suitable alternative arrangements are in place for anyone needing access to urgent dental care.

We have written to all Midlands dental practices to remind them that if they intend to operate other than their usual hours they must have arranged suitable local NHS provision with a “buddy” practice and have a dedicated telephone number to enable their patients to access the alternative local service.

Practices should have up to date information for patients on their answerphones and websites informing patients of their reduced hours and signposting to alternative services. Notices on practice doors should also be used, informing patients of any reduced opening hours, four weeks in advance of the temporary change.

During normal contracted hours a practice should not divert patients to NHS111, Out of Hours providers or local Urgent Dental Centres. Normal local Out of Hours arrangements will be in place to provide urgent dental care cover during the Christmas and New Year period.

### **Our advice for people seeking NHS dental care is as follows:**

People should continue to contact their local dental surgery by phone for advice on dental care and treatment. During the Christmas and New Year period practices will be signposting to alternative services if they are not open. Out of usual surgery hours patients should contact NHS 111. Patients are still expected to pay normal dental charges (unless exempt) but should not be charged extra.



Most dentists will require patients to be clinically assessed by phone or video consultation prior to being seen in the dental surgery should this be needed. Dental practices can prescribe antibiotics or painkillers by phone.

NHS patients should not be told that they can only access care privately. You may have to wait longer than normal for an appointment for treatment (particularly for AGP procedures) as dentists will be prioritising the most urgent cases.

Patients that do not have a regular dentist or have not recently accessed NHS Dental care, should contact NHS 111. It is often quicker and easier to use the online system rather than phoning. Patients will then be directed to a dental practice who can assess them by phone and if needed they will be offered face to face care at a practice with capacity to see them. This may be an Urgent Dental Centre.

Patients that are offered dental appointments in whatever setting, including hospitals, should attend their appointment. If for whatever reason, patients are not able to attend they must let the practice/hospital know in advance to enable them to offer the appointment to another patient.

Anyone who feels unwell or has any Covid -19 symptoms or is self-isolating following contact from NHS Test and Trace should not visit their normal surgery even if they have a confirmed appointment. It is important for patients to be honest about whether they are symptomatic or have been asked to self-isolate. Dedicated Urgent Dental Centres continue to operate where symptomatic or self-isolating patients needing urgent care can be seen and treated.