

Dental Treatment - What you need to know

What is included in this guide?

This Healthwatch guide provides you with the key information about seeing a dentist through the NHS. For a more detailed guide please [click here](#).

If you have any questions or comments about dentistry, please contact us:

By Telephone: 0300 012 0122

By Email: helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

How COVID has affected NHS dental services

What you need to know

NHS dentistry has been significantly affected by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), resulting in fewer available appointments.

NHS dental services are open for business, but it is not yet 'Business as Usual'.

Dentists are prioritising patients according to clinical need. It is important to clearly explain what your need is and what impact it is having when contacting a dentist (see below).

You may wait longer for routine, non-urgent treatments on the NHS. Waiting lists for non-urgent routine check-ups can be as long as 6 months.

NHS and private dental treatment

What you need to know

High street dentists are private businesses that work for the NHS to provide dental care for patients.

Strict criteria govern what and how many NHS treatments dentists can provide. Please [click this link](#) to learn more about the different dental treatments that are available through the NHS.

NHS dental care is subsidised by the government. This means that some of the cost of looking after your teeth has already been paid for.

Unless you are exempt, you will need to pay for most NHS treatment (see below).

The NHS can pay towards your treatment if a dentist says that you have a clinical "need" and the dentist has the capacity to provide the treatment. If they do not have the capacity, they may offer to treat you privately.

NHS dental treatment looks after the health of your teeth but does not cover cosmetic treatments.

Private treatment looks after the health of your teeth and also cosmetic treatments. You must fully cover the costs of each private treatment received. Sometimes finance plans or dental insurance are available to help.

Your dentist must explain what treatment you need and how much of the cost will be met through the NHS or privately by you. You should always confirm what these costs are before starting treatment and whether it is provided through the NHS.

Registering with a dentist

What you need to know

You do not need to formally register with a dentist in the same way as with a GP.

You can attend any dentist as long as they have the capacity to see you.

The NHS has a website that lets you [search for an NHS dentist near you](#) by entering your town, city, or postcode. This will help identify dentists offering NHS treatment but not their availability, so you must contact practices directly to enquire.

You will be asked to fill in a new patient form at your first visit.

Registering for a course of treatment does not necessarily mean that you are permanently registered with the same dental practice. You should always enquire directly with the dental practice.

Routine check-ups

What you need to know

Dental practices will not always have the capacity to take on new NHS patients. Many practices will prioritise seeing those patients who are already on their database. You may, therefore, be asked to join a waiting list to be seen. Average waiting times for routine check-ups are up to 6 months.

If your teeth and gums are healthy, you may not need a routine check-up for up to 24 months.

The dentist will advise you on how often you need a check-up. They should also advise you how often you should have a check-up in order to continue to be seen as an NHS patient.

In between check-ups the NHS provides [advice on how to maintain healthy teeth and gums](#).

If you do not make or attend NHS appointments with the frequency specified by the dentist your dental health may be at risk. You may also be removed from the patient database of that practice.

How to explain what your dental need is

What you need to know

It is important to clearly explain what your need is and what impact it is having, e.g. if you are in pain, experiencing difficulties eating or sleeping, or have any facial swelling.

Dental practices determine the urgency of your treatment by taking a detailed history of your symptoms. This helps them get an idea of the diagnosis which will then help them decide how quickly you need to be seen.

You should explain if your dental need is linked to other health problems.

You also need to tell the dentist or receptionist if you are in a vulnerable patient group. This includes people who are homeless, travellers, migrants or refugees and looked after children.

Further advice about how to explain your dental need can be found in our [detailed guide](#).

If you require urgent or emergency support, ask if the practice can see you for urgent treatment through the NHS. If that is not possible you may be offered a private appointment. Having private treatment does not mean that you cannot return to NHS treatment in the future, and this may even be possible with the same dentist.

If you are unable to contact or see a dentist and you believe it is urgent, call NHS 111. Only visit Emergency Departments (A&E) in serious circumstances, such as:

- When you are in severe pain that a dentist is unable to help you with
- If you are experiencing heavy bleeding
- If you have severe facial or oral swelling
- If you have injuries to the face, mouth, or teeth.

You may find some relief using remedies at home whilst you wait for treatment. [A guide to Home Care is available by clicking here](#). A high-street pharmacist may also be able to offer you advice.

Costs of NHS dental treatment

What you need to know

Before starting your treatment remember to ask questions:

“Is this NHS or private treatment?”

“What is the cost of my treatment, and how much of my treatment will be met by the NHS?”

Regardless of the treatment you have, you should understand what dental treatment has been suggested and how much it will cost. You should only be charged for private dental treatment if you agreed to have private dental treatment.

Ask for a [written treatment plan](#) which explains what treatment you are having and the costs involved. You should sign this and ask for a copy.

You should only be asked to pay for NHS treatment once you have received this.

NHS treatments are provided under one of three [Bands](#). Click this link to learn more about [NHS costs](#).

If you need further treatment, in some cases you will not need to pay again within two months of your initial treatment. And some treatments are guaranteed for 12 months (our detailed guide provides more information).

Some people are eligible for free NHS treatment, and financial support is available for others. To check the costs of treatment and whether you are eligible for free treatment, or support with paying, visit the [NHS website](#), or read our [detailed guide](#).

Making a complaint

What you need to know

You have the right to raise a concern or complaint if you are not happy with any aspect of your treatment.

Your first step is to make a complaint directly with the dental practice.

If you are not happy with the response you get, you can complain to NHS England.

- email: england.contactus@nhs.net
- phone: 0300 311 2233
- visit the [NHS England website](#)

If you are unable to find a local dentist who can see you, and NHS England has been unable to help you find a dentist, you should raise your concerns by contacting your local Healthwatch and NHS England.

Links to other information

Emergency Dental Services below are open Monday to Friday 5.30pm to 10pm, or Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays 8.30am-1pm.

Worthing Area: Tel: 01903 230364

Chichester area: Tel: 01243 793697

Crawley area: Tel: 01293 518541

Haywards Heath area: Tel: 01444 440695

Dental Helpline: Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm 0300 12 1663

NHS - [What can your NHS dentist do for you?](#)

NHS - [Easyread What your dentist can do for you?](#)

NHS - [Dental services](#)