

Prof. Sara Hurley
Chief Dental Officer for England
NHS England and NHS Improvement

Reply to: mpinbox@nhs.net

To:
Members of Parliament (England)

17th June 2020

Dear member of parliament,

Re: Restarting NHS dental services

On 25th March, in response to COVID-19, I asked all dental practices in England to close for face-to-face consultations and move to telephone triage for urgent dental issues.

To meet the continuing need for urgent dental care, the dental profession stepped forward in partnership with NHS to deliver over five hundred urgent dental centres across England, for face to face access to urgent dental treatment. This was an extraordinary feat. Access to and support from these urgent dental care centres will remain available throughout our next phase as we work with the profession to resume face to face care in all dental practices.

With this in mind I am writing to you to update on our progress with getting dental services back up and running.

The NHS' approach to restarting dental services

On 28th May we confirmed the intent that from 8th June primary care dental services (general dental practices and community dental services) may resume face-to-face care (both routine and urgent) for appropriate patient groups. This announcement was preceded by the cascade of a "prompt to prepare" guidance for all dental practices and followed by the publication of a detailed [standard operating procedure](#) to support resumption of dental care in England.

Dental care will resume in a way that is safe and with flexibility for dental practices to do what is best for their patients and their teams. This means there will be a gradual approach to resumption of dental treatments based on clinical risk assessments, the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the ability to apply infection prevention control measures.

We are still advising practices to minimise face-to-face care where possible and to minimise the number of aerosol-generating procedures. Therefore, the range of dental treatments that patients will be offered will be different to that which your constituents received before 25 March. It is likely to be some months before general dental practitioners are able provide care in a way that your constituents will be used to and will depend in part on the further easing of COVID-19 control measures.

If you have any questions regarding the delivery of dental services within your constituency, your first port of call should be to your local NHS England and NHS Improvement Regional Director of Primary Care Commissioning and Public Health. You can make contact with them through your regional NHS team, the contact details of which are your [personalised MP's guide to the NHS](#).

Arrangements for shielded patients

We continue to advise that shielded patients, those at the highest possible risk from COVID-19, should not currently attend dental settings unless absolutely necessary. If face-to-face care is required, dental teams have been asked to align dental care provision with the local arrangements for shielded patients or patients at increased risk. Often, that means dental teams will consult the patient's GP and/or other dedicated health and social care professionals as necessary to arrange face-to-face care in a way that the patient needs.

In some cases, urgent dental care may be provided at home by a dedicated dental team. If that is not possible or is clinically inappropriate, the provider must have appropriate measures in place to separate shielded patients from possible COVID-19 cases.

Funding for dental services

Initially NHS England will maintain the current temporary contract arrangements to make monthly payments in 2020-21 to all practices that are equal to 1/12th of their current annual contract value, subject to abatement for lower variable costs. Work will continue with the BDA on the mechanisms for the full 2020-21 contract year with the intention of reintroducing a link to delivery of activity and outcomes.

As a dentist of over 30 years committed public service, my priority is to best serve the patient by ensuring access to appropriate and timely dental care. However, given the precautions necessary to minimise the COVID infection risk, I am sure you too recognise that dental practice has to adapt the way that they offer and deliver care with changes in pace, proximity and protection required for public and patient safety.

I hope this update gives you the assurance of the ongoing commitment to the nation's oral health and that dental care continues to be a vital component of the NHS offer to all patients.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Hurley', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Prof Sara Hurley
Chief Dental Officer for England