

Update on GP Appointments

Having raised the issue of GP appointments with the Secretary of State and Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of NHS England I was pleased to learn that NHS England has directed GPs to ensure that they are offering face to face appointments:

Dear colleagues

UPDATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) TO SUPPORT RESTORATION OF GENERAL PRACTICE SERVICES

Guidance on the phased easing of Covid-19 restrictions continues to be issued by government, in line with the Coronavirus roadmap out of lockdown, with services following and adapting accordingly.

As such, ahead of government rules on social distancing changing from 17 May, we would like to draw your attention to the Standard Operating Procedure which will be published shortly, and which will update and replace previous guidance.

- **Half of all general practice appointments during the pandemic have been delivered in person, GP practices must all ensure they are offering face to face appointments.** As the chair of the Royal College of GPs has said 'once we get out of the pandemic and things return to a more normal way of living and working, we don't want to see general practice become a totally, or even mostly, remote service', so while the expanded use of video, online and telephone consultations can be maintained where patients find benefit from them, this should be done alongside a clear offer of appointments in person.
- Patients and clinicians have a choice of consultation mode. Patients' input into this choice should be sought and **practices should respect preferences for face to face care unless there are good clinical reasons to the contrary**, for example the presence of COVID symptoms. If proceeding remotely, the clinician should be confident that it will not have a negative impact on their ability to carry out the consultation effectively. The RCGP has published guidance on '[Remote versus face-to-face: which to use and when?](#)'. We are asking CCGs to prioritise support to practices who are reporting very low levels of face to face appointments.
- **All practice receptions should be open to patients**, adhering to social distancing and IPC guidance. This is important for ensuring that patients who do not have easy access to phones or other devices are not disadvantaged in their ability to access care. Receptions will not yet feel like they did prepandemic – for example where space is very constrained patients may be asked to queue outside. Individuals with COVID-19 symptoms or who meet criteria for self-isolation should continue to follow public health guidance. Posters providing information about the symptoms of

coronavirus and to direct patients that have symptoms or a positive test result in the last 10 days not to enter the building are available on the [Public Health England Campaign Resources Centre website](#).

- **Patients should be treated consistently regardless of mode of access.** Ideally, a patient attending the practice reception should be triaged on the same basis as they would be via phone or via an online consultation system.
- Practices should continue to engage with their practice population regarding access models and should actively adapt their processes as appropriate in response to feedback.

Thank you for your continued hard work and for your ongoing commitment to continuing to deliver the highest quality general practice services.

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