

Access to general practice communications toolkit

February 2021

This toolkit is correct at the time of publishing but may be updated to reflect changes in advice in the context of COVID-19. Any changes since its first publication in September 2020 are highlighted in yellow.

This toolkit has been developed to support general practice, primary care networks and clinical commissioning groups to explain to patients how they can safely access general practice.

There are currently several priorities:

- Being clear that practices are open, face-to-face appointments remain available to all patients but they are working differently
- Helping to explain the difference between online/remote triage and remote consultations
- Ensuring patients continue to receive the same services they would normally receive from a GP practice wherever there is a clinical need and are not directed to other providers.
- Rolling out the COVID-19 vaccinations to cohort patients in local vaccination sites as well as hospital hubs and vaccination centres.

Background

COVID-19 has changed how patients access their GP. The pandemic has super charged the use of remote consultations in primary care. These will never replace face-to-face appointments which should be available to all patients where appropriate. However, remote consultations can be a convenient way for people to access medical advice and treatment. Video consultations are available in GP practices covering 99% of the population in England. Meanwhile, online consultations, where a patient can contact their GP practice directly via the internet, are now available in 90% of GP practices ([Appointments in General Practice](#)).

[December 2020](#)). We want patients to continue to benefit from the increased accessibility of GP services using online consultation requests and being able to have appointments remotely (telephone, video and messaging) with their GP practice. Many patients find these convenient and easy to use. While we don't want to reverse the strides that have been made towards remote consultations, we need to make clear to patients that face-to-face appointments are there for all who need them. **The choice of appointment mode should also take account of patient preferences and the access they have to the internet and telephone.**

There is also a risk that if patients don't feel they have access to a GP for non-urgent issues, they will seek help at A&E **or choose not to use the NHS and potentially leave health issues undetected.** The [Help Us Help You](#) campaigns were created to address this issue.

Key patient messaging

- General practice is still open, but due to the coronavirus outbreak, how you contact your GP surgery will be different at the moment.
- **Your NHS services have a range of measures in place to keep you safe from COVID-19 including regular cleaning of patient areas and social distancing. Please ensure you wear a face covering to your appointment.**
- Face-to-face appointments are available to *all* patients where there is a clinical need. You will be asked to first discuss your conditions over the phone or online with a member of the healthcare team to assess what would be most appropriate for you and which practice member would best provide it.
- **Most GP practices are also offering online consultations and video consultations, as well as telephone consultations. These can be convenient and flexible ways to receive healthcare. Where patients need to be seen by a health professional face-to-face, this will be arranged. If you have a preference about how to access care you can discuss it with your practice.**
- General practice continues to offer care based on clinical need.
- General practice continues to offer cervical smears and childhood immunisations.
- **Your practice is delighted to be undertaking the largest vaccination programme in the history of the NHS. They are balancing this programme with continuing to be open and managing your other clinical needs. Please do be reassured that if you need medical attention, your practice is here for you and will determine how to best support you, based on your symptoms.**

- The NHS is vaccinating those people who experts have agreed will benefit from it the most. A vaccination programme of this size and scale will still take some time to roll out in full.
- Please be assured that everyone who needs the vaccine will be offered it. The NHS will be in touch with you when it is your turn to be vaccinated. Please don't call us before you are invited. In the meantime, you can get information about the COVID-19 Vaccination online at www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination.
- It is important to register with your local GP. Anyone in England can register with a GP, without needing to show proof of address, ID or immigration status. [Find out more about how to register with a GP](#).
- Please be polite and respectful, your GP and practice team are available and working hard to support you, your family and friends health and care needs.
- Visit the local pharmacy for clinical advice on minor health concerns

Four ways to seek healthcare advice from a GP

1. Visit your GP surgery website and complete a confidential online form to request advice or treatment. You will receive a response as soon as possible, usually within two working days. Online forms should not be used for very urgent medical problems.
2. Call your surgery to arrange an appointment. You will usually be assessed by a clinician on the telephone first, with face-to-face care arranged if clinically needed. If you have a preference about how to access care you can discuss it with your practice.
3. For urgent issues or out of hours, you can also call the NHS on 111 or go online to seek NHS advice 111.nhs.uk
4. Download the [NHS App](#) to order repeat prescriptions and get health advice.

Example website and newsletter copy – non-vaccination site

We are still open and here for you. We are continuing to provide services as we have been doing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We are prioritising delivering of care and services based on clinical needs.

If you need medical advice or treatment, please ring us on xxx or, for non-urgent advice or treatment, visit our website and send us your query – our opening hours are xxx.

Due to coronavirus, how you contact us will be different at the moment. This is to limit face-to-face contact whenever possible and help stop the spread of coronavirus.

When you phone or go online, you will be asked to provide some information about your healthcare need. This will help the practice healthcare team assess the most appropriate way to provide your care, which may include a face-to-face consultation and ensure it is provided by the most appropriate person. **Face-to-face appointments are available to all patients where there is a clinical need.**

Online consultation requests for non-urgent help can be made at any time. They will be responded to as soon as possible, usually within two working days.

Alternatively, visit the [local pharmacy](#) for clinical advice on minor health concerns.

For urgent issues or out of hours, you can also call the NHS on 111 or go online to seek NHS advice 111.nhs.uk

Appointments are being delivered face-to-face, by telephone, or using video calls and messaging to your mobile or computer – the practice team will assess what is most appropriate for you **and if you have a preference you can discuss this with them.**

Attending a face-to-face appointment

If you are asked to come into the surgery for a face-to-face appointment, please remember to wear a face covering. Measures are in place to keep you safe from infection during your visit to the surgery. **If you have a disability or condition which means you cannot wear a face covering or cannot communicate with someone who is wearing a face mask, or require other adjustments before your appointment, please let the surgery know ahead of your arrival.**

COVID-19 Vaccination

The NHS is currently vaccinating those people who experts have agreed will benefit from it the most. A vaccination programme of this size and scale will still take some time to complete. Please be assured that everyone who needs the vaccine will be offered it. The NHS will be in touch with you when it is your turn to be vaccinated. Please don't call us before you are invited. In the meantime, you can get information about the COVID-19 Vaccination online at www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination.

Our staff are working extremely hard to provide services and care and we would like to thank our patients for your continued support.

Example website and newsletter copy – vaccination site

We are still open and here for you. We are continuing to provide services as we have been doing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We are prioritising delivering of care and services based on clinical needs.

We are still open and here for you and we are continuing to provide services as we have been doing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you need medical advice or treatment, please ring us on xxx or, for non-urgent advice or treatment, visit our website and send us your query – our opening hours are xxx.

Due to coronavirus, how you contact us will be different at the moment. This is to limit face-to-face contact whenever possible and help stop the spread of coronavirus.

Online consultation requests for non-urgent help can be made at any time. They will be responded to as soon as possible, usually within two working days.

Alternatively, visit the [local pharmacy](#) for clinical advice on minor health concerns.

For urgent issues or out of hours, you can also call the NHS on 111 or go online to seek NHS advice 111.nhs.uk

Please do not come to the surgery unless you have an appointment.

Appointments are being delivered face-to-face, by telephone, or using video calls and messaging to your mobile or computer – the practice team will assess what is most appropriate for you. If you have a preference about how to access care you can discuss it with your practice.

Attending a face-to-face appointment

If you are asked to come into the surgery for a face-to-face appointment, please remember to wear a face covering. Measures are in place to keep you safe from infection during your visit to the surgery. If you have a disability or condition which means you cannot wear a face covering or communicating with someone who is wearing personal protective equipment or face mask, or you need to make any other adjustments before your appointment, please let the surgery know ahead of your arrival.

COVID-19 Vaccination programme

Our practice is currently supporting the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme. This means that at certain times, part of our premises will be used for vaccine clinics / some of our team will be involved in running vaccine clinics. <delete as appropriate>

This means that if you are asked to attend a face-to-face appointment, this may be at a different location to the one you normally attend or you may see someone different to usual.

The NHS is vaccinating those people who experts have agreed will benefit from it the most. A vaccination programme of this size and scale will still take some time to roll out in full. Please be assured that everyone who needs the vaccine will be offered it. The NHS will be in touch with you when it is your turn to be vaccinated. Please don't call us before you are invited.

In the meantime, you can get information about the COVID-19 Vaccination online at www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination.

Our staff are working extremely hard to provide services and care and we would like to thank our patients for your continued support.

Answerphone message

Thank you for calling xxx we are here to help you. Our opening hours are xxx. Appointments are being delivered by phone, using video calls and messaging to your mobile or computer. Patients will be asked to attend an appointment face-to-face if there is a clinical need. You will be advised on the best approach for you and can discuss your preference with us. If you are asked to come into the surgery, please remember to wear a face covering. Measures are in place to keep you safe from infection during your visit to the surgery. You can also call NHS 111. Please do not come to the surgery unless you have an appointment.

We cannot answer COVID-19 vaccine enquires or manage vaccination bookings on this number.

The NHS is prioritising vaccinating those people who experts have agreed will benefit from it the most. We will let you know when it is your turn to book your vaccination.

In the meantime, you can get information about the COVID-19 Vaccination online at www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination.

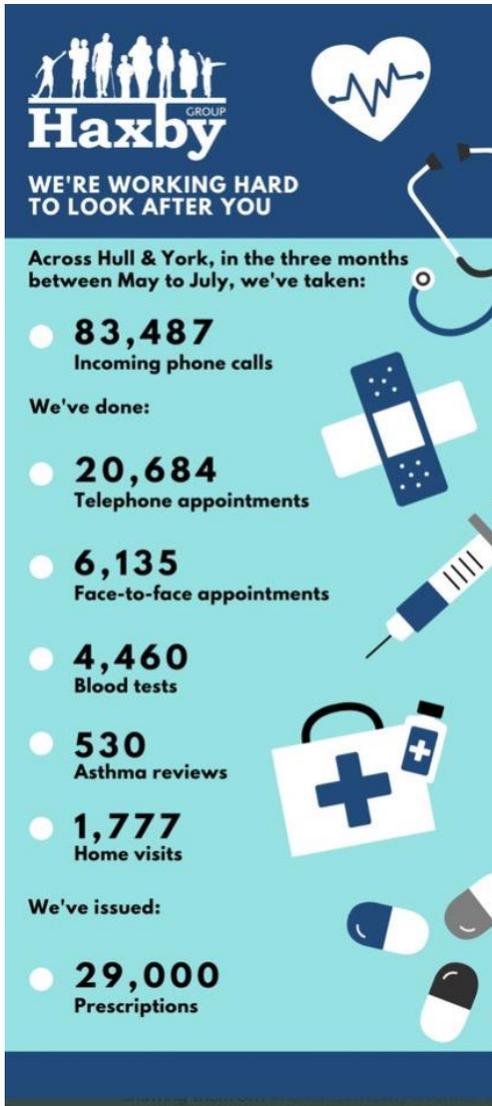
SMS message

Dear patient, we are here to deal with your health needs. Please can we remind you to only attend the surgery if you are asked to do so. If you need an appointment, please ring us on xxx, or to request non-urgent medical care, visit our website www.xxxx.nhs.uk

Please remember to wear a face covering if you have an appointment at the surgery. Measures are in place to keep you safe from infection. You can also call 111 for NHS advice.

Suggested content

Use performance data to reassure patients about the activity that has happened to-date, e.g.:



Video

Produce or reuse vox pop videos encouraging patients to get in touch if they are worried about symptoms. See this example:

<https://twitter.com/NHSEngland/status/1296714927877611520>

Assets

The following assets have been produced for you to use locally and can be downloaded from [PHE's Campaign Resource Centre](#)

Poster

Add your details in the white box and use this on your GP practice entrance area. Varying sizes and a black and white version is available on the Campaign Resource Centre website.



NHS

**WE ARE HERE FOR YOU
WITH MEASURES IN PLACE
TO PROTECT YOU AND OUR
STAFF FROM CORONAVIRUS.**

IF YOU NEED HELP FROM THIS GP PRACTICE

- Contact us online or by phone first
- You will be assessed by a member of the healthcare team and appropriate care will be arranged
- Face-to-face appointments are available wherever there is a clinical need
- If you do need to enter the building, please wear a face covering and follow social distancing
- Download the NHS App to order repeat prescriptions and get health advice. nhs.uk/nhsapp

If you need urgent medical help or it's out of hours, call 111 or go online 111.nhs.uk

Your health matters help us help you

Social media

Use the below updated social media cards and accompanying copy on your social media channels.



NHS

**GP PRACTICES
HAVE MEASURES IN
PLACE TO MINIMISE
THE RISK FROM
CORONAVIRUS.**

Your health matters help us help you

Contact your GP practice online or by phone to be assessed and receive help. **A face-to-face appointment will be arranged if appropriate.** Do not visit your GP if you have coronavirus symptoms or are self-isolating. Follow the advice at nhs.uk.

[#HelpUsHelpYou](#)



NHS

**FACE-TO-FACE
GP PRACTICE
APPOINTMENTS
ARE AVAILABLE
TO PATIENTS.**

Your
health
matters
help us
help you

Contact your GP practice online or by phone to be assessed and receive help.

If a face-to-face appointment is clinically necessary, this will be arranged. Measures will be in place to minimise the risk of coronavirus.

[#HelpUsHelpYou](#)

Animation

How to access your GP animation



NHS

This animation explains to the public how access to their GP practice has changed to ensure patients get the best possible care safely and quickly.

Access the full suite of materials including the animation video file is available to download on [PHE's Campaign Resource Centre](#) to include:

Your general practice is here for you.

- Four social media clips
- The above clips with burned in English subtitles
- English subtitles for these videos – these are provided as .srt files which can be added to the video through YouTube or on Twitter
- Subtitles in 12 community languages – also provided as .srt files to be used as appropriate for the local regions
- Supporting copy for social media and bulletins

Additional resources

- More [general practice resources](#) are available on Public Health England's Campaign Resource Centre
- [Video explaining how to contact your GP remotely](#) (video)

- [Health at Home – how to access NHS services online](#) (video)

Supporting patients with specific access needs

- [Online consultation](#) software used to enable type-based or interpreter-led communication (in addition to video consultation) with patients and/or their carer
- [Microsoft Teams](#) is also available for use by NHSmail accounts and can be used for 3-way video calls between clinicians, interpreters and patients
- [Communicating with people with hearing loss](#) (web page)
- Access to British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters: [BSL Health Access](#) (web page) delivers immediate, on demand access to British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters for communication with Deaf people
- [Support and guidance for homeless patients](#) (web page)
- [Improving GP registration among social excluded groups](#)
- [Mental health, learning disabilities and autism: Guidance](#)