

## Referral to treatment (RTT) waiting times - patient initiated clock pauses

This note sets out details of mandatory national waiting times rules and reporting guidance on patient initiated waiting time clock pauses for patients on consultant-led non-emergency referral to treatment pathways.

It is essential that only legitimate adjustments are applied to patient waiting times and that these are reported correctly in data returns to the Department of Health.

The key points are that:

- Clock pauses may be applied to incomplete/open pathways locally – to aid good waiting list management and to ensure patients are treated in order of clinical priority - however, **adjustments must not be applied to either non-admitted or incomplete pathways RTT data reported in monthly RTT returns to the Department of Health.**
- The only clock pause adjustments allowed are for patient initiated delays to completed admitted waited times data. In order to apply an adjustment a patient must have declined at least 2 reasonable appointment offers for admission. The clock may only be paused for the duration of the time between the earliest reasonable offer which the patient declines and the date from which the patient makes themselves available again for admission.
- No clock pause adjustments are allowed for NHS initiated cancellations or rearrangements.
- NHS organisations reporting data that is not in line with the above (e.g. those identified through routine monthly validation checks by the Department of Health or local validation processes) will be investigated.
- Where an organisation is unable to capture and submit completed admitted data that is in line with the national RTT clock rules, with regards to clock pauses, then they should submit these data without adjustments to minimise the risk of incorrect waiting times being published.

- These rules were introduced in 2008 and have remained unchanged since that time.

### National Waiting Times Rules

As set out in the 'Consultant-led RTT Clock Rules Suite' (<http://transparency.dh.gov.uk/2012/06/29/rtt-waiting-times-guidance/>), patients' waiting time clocks may be paused only where a decision to admit has been made, and the patient has declined at least 2 reasonable appointment offers for admission. The clock is paused for the duration of the time between the earliest reasonable appointment offer date (called the EROD) and the date from which the patient makes themselves available again for admission.

Clocks may not be paused for patient initiated delays at any other part of the RTT pathway including all outpatient and diagnostic stages.

Once a decision to admit has been made, patients should be offered the earliest available dates to come in. If patients are offered and decline at least 2 reasonable offers for admission their waiting time clock may be paused. Reasonable is defined as an offer of an appointment with at least 3 weeks notice.

The 3 weeks notice reasonableness rule does not prevent patients from being offered earlier appointments. It just means that if the patient declines the earlier appointment then this offer date cannot be used in a clock pause adjustment.

A patient's paused clock should be restarted from the date that the patient makes themselves available for admission again. Not from the date of the appointment the patient accepts if that is more than a few days later.

If a patient makes themselves unavailable for a set period of time (e.g. due to school holidays or other reasons) then this may mean that offering actual dates which meet the reasonableness criteria would be inappropriate (as the patient would be offered dates that the provider already knew they couldn't make). In this case, the waiting

time clock can be paused from the earliest reasonable offer date that the provider could have given the patient had they been available up until the time that the patient makes themselves available for admission again. The final adjusted wait, therefore, is the length that the RTT pathway would have been if the patient had not chosen to delay their admission.

Figure A illustrates how patient pauses for completed admitted waiting time data reported to DH should be calculated.

### ***Cancellations and rebookings***

Where a patient accepts a reasonable offer for admission, but subsequently cancels, their clock should only be paused if, when rebooking their admission date, they subsequently turn down 2 'reasonable' offers for admission.

Reasonable is defined as an offer of an appointment with at least 3 weeks notice.

Where a clock has already been paused due to a patient turning down 2 reasonable offers, and the patient cancels the agreed admission date, then the existing clock pause period may be extended to that of the new date that the patient makes themselves available again for admission.

Where a patient accepts a reasonable offer for admission, but this is subsequently cancelled by the provider, the patient's clock should only be paused if, when rebooking their admission date, they subsequently turn down 2 reasonable offers for admission.

Where a clock has already been paused due to a patient turning down 2 reasonable offers, and the provider cancels the agreed admission date, then the existing clock pause period should be removed.

### **National reporting guidance:**

The national guidance on the correct reporting of RTT waiting times:

- How to Measure
- Referral to Treatment FAQs

can be found at:

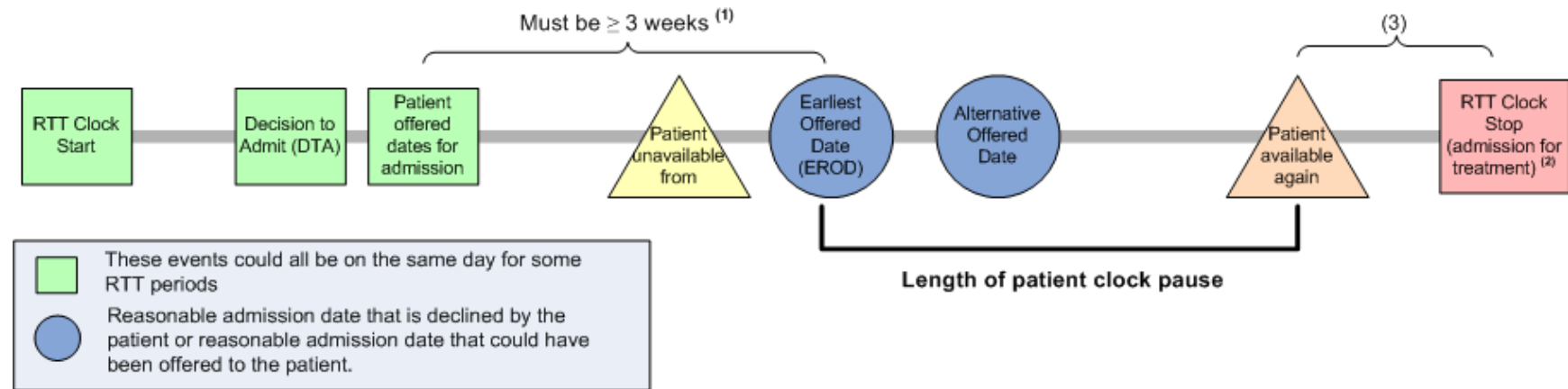
<http://transparency.dh.gov.uk/2012/06/29/rtt-waiting-times-guidance/>

As set out in this guidance the NHS must submit an RTT data return each month in four parts:

- *Part 1a - Completed RTT waiting times for admitted patients - i.e. RTT waiting times for patients whose RTT clock stopped during the month with an inpatient/day case admission*
- *Part 1b - Completed RTT waiting times for non-admitted patients - i.e. RTT waiting times for patients whose RTT clock stopped during the month for reasons other than an inpatient/day case admission*
- *Part 2 - Incomplete RTT waiting times - i.e. RTT waiting times for patients whose RTT clock is still running at the end of the month*
- *Completed RTT waiting times for admitted patients on an adjusted basis - i.e. RTT waiting times for admitted patients whose RTT clock stopped during the month with an inpatient/day case admission including adjustments for legitimate clock pauses*

Figure 1

## Consultant-led Admitted RTT period



### Notes:

1. Patients can be offered appointments earlier than 3 weeks away, but if they decline, this date should not be used as the EROD.
2. The RTT clock stop can be used as the clock pause end, but only if the time between the patient becoming available and the accepted admission date is limited (i.e. a few days)
3. A patient clock pause should not be applied if the time between the patient becoming available and the accepted admission date is not limited (i.e. more than a few days) and the date the patient was available again cannot be identified to use as the pause end.