

GP access toolkit

December 2021



Why is your GP practice working differently?

In order to keep staff and visitors safe during the Covid-19 pandemic, GP practices have had to adapt how they work. Like the rest of the health service, practices have made use of technology by introducing additional telephone and video appointments.

As the Covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing, practices are continuing to keep robust infection prevention measures in place, and telephone triage continues to be the first point of contact. However, face-to-face appointments are being offered and you can still visit in person should you need to.

If you need to visit your GP practice, your temperature may be taken on arrival and you will also need to sanitise your hands. We would appreciate your co-operation in ensuring you observe social distancing while in your GP surgery. There is clear signage to help guide you and chairs in the waiting room are positioned apart from each other. You should wear a face covering (unless exempt) if you need to attend the surgery in person.

Please be mindful that at times, workforces may be affected by Covid-19, so teams may be smaller than usual. Whilst we appreciate that this can be a frustrating and unsettling time, please rest assured that practices are doing all they can to manage patient needs during a time of increased demand. Thank you for your patience.

Although it remains a challenging time for all NHS services, you should not put off getting the care you need. Your GP practice is open and is here for you and your family.

How you can access support

There are a number of ways to get the help you need in a way that suits your needs.

- Go online to 111.nhs.uk or call NHS 111.
- e-consult service on your practice's website and get a reply within two working days. You can also request medication, sick notes and bloods results through this service.
- Call your practice to discuss the most appropriate appointment.

- Visit your GP practice website and complete a confidential online form.
- Download the NHS App to order repeat prescriptions, book appointments or check your symptoms.
- For life-threatening emergencies, please call 999 or go straight to A&E.

For healthcare needs regarding children, urgent problems or for those patients who are unable to access our online services, we ask that you telephone your practice and your call will be answered as soon as possible.

What to expect when you contact your GP practice

Practice reception teams will conduct an initial assessment over the phone to make sure that those with the greatest need are seen first. The receptionist will ask you some questions so that they can get you the right care, in the right way, by the right professional. This may not necessarily be a GP.

They will consider:

- Who is best to help you.
- What type of appointment best suits your needs.
- Whether help from another health service is more appropriate. For example, a pharmacy or urgent treatment centre.

Practice reception teams are trained to know about the care and services available to you.

- They will know whether self-referral is available for certain services.
- They can make appointments for your care.
- They can direct you to new services you may not be aware of.

They are skilled in assisting with triage and treat all information in confidence. All staff operate according to strict guidelines and work under clinical supervision. You can trust them to treat all information confidentially. They are a vital part of your practice team. Please treat them with respect. **Any form of abuse towards staff will not be tolerated.**

Who might you see at your GP practice?

GPs work as part of large multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) who all support the physical, psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, cultural and economic aspects of a person's care. Although these will vary depending on your practice, some professionals you may see at your practice include:

- **GP:** a highly skilled doctor who support patients throughout their lives.
- **GP registrar:** a qualified doctor who is training to become a GP.
- **Locum/sessional doctor:** a fully qualified GP who works at the practice on a temporary basis.
- **Practice nurse:** a qualified and registered nurse who can help with health issues such as family planning, healthy living advice, blood pressure checks and dressings.
- **Nurse practitioners:** a trained specialist nurse who has undertaken additional medical education in order to provide advanced nursing care and to prescribe medication. Nurse practitioners can provide treatment and advice for many problems for which you may have seen a doctor for in the past.
- **Healthcare assistant:** supports the practice nurse with their daily work and helps to carry out tasks such as phlebotomy (drawing blood), blood pressure measurement and new patient checks.
- **Pharmacist:** a highly qualified expert in medicines who can help carry out structured medication reviews for patients with ongoing health problems as well as a range of other treatments.

- **Mental health practitioner:** a first point of contact to give patients guidance, advice and treatment for mental health symptoms such as low mood, anxiety and depression.
- **Health visitor:** a registered nurse who has received training particularly related to babies, children and pregnant women.
- **Podiatrist:** treats abnormal conditions of the feet and lower limbs.
- **Social prescribing link worker:** connects people with local community activities and services that can help improve their health and wellbeing.
- **Practice managers:** manage the business aspect of the practice.
- **Receptionists and administration staff:** provide an important link for patients with the practice and are your initial contact point for general enquiries.

What else do GPs do?

GP services remain very busy, providing more appointments than ever before whilst also delivering the winter vaccination programme.

In addition to this, their work can include:

- Reviewing and acting upon letters from hospital specialists and patients
- Signing repeat prescriptions
- Immunisations
- Processing referrals
- Medication reviews and pharmacy liaison
- Learning Disability reviews
- Mandatory training
- Death certificates and coroner reports
- End-of-life care
- Statements of fitness for work
- Home visiting
- Care home ward rounds
- Managing national and local targets

Other important information

- If you have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) please **DO NOT** visit your GP practice. Please book a PCR test as soon as possible and contact your practice if you need to rearrange an appointment.
- Please cancel your appointment if you do not need it anymore or you are unable to attend. It can then be made available for someone else.
- Please call the practice during the afternoon if your call isn't about booking an appointment for that day.
- How to make the most of your GP appointment
- Guide on making the most of your remote (telephone or video) appointment
- If you have a question about a common ailment, your local pharmacist can give free confidential advice. Find your local pharmacy.
- For regional advice and information, visit Beat Covid NE
- If you're looking for information about the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme, visit the CCG COVID vaccination webpage.
- For mental health support, please visit NHS Every Mind Matters.
- Protecting those who are clinically extremely vulnerable
- How to wear face masks
- How to get a self-isolation note for work
- Latest statistics for Northumberland
- Find out how many confirmed cases are there in your area

Social media suggested posts and visuals

Twitter: @NHSNIandCCG

Facebook: @northumberlandccg

Suggested hashtags: #GeneralPractice #PrimaryCare #NHS #PrimaryCareNetworks #LookingAfterYou #TeamGP #PCNs

Suggested post	Visual/animation
<p>GP practices have robust infection prevention measures in place to keep you, your loved ones and staff safe during the ongoing #Covid19 pandemic.</p> <p>Need to you visit your GP practice? Remember</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wash your hands Wear a face covering and Socially distance. 	<p>Why are GP practices working differently?</p> <p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's still a challenging time and to help protect everyone practices are required to continue to maintain safe infection control and minimise physical contact. • Surgeries are working hard to provide more appointments than ever before and to deliver the winter vaccination programme. • Practices in Northumberland are open and here to help you and your family. 
<p>It's still a challenging time for all our #NHS services but your GP practice is open and is doing all it can to manage its patients' needs during a time of increased demand. Please don't hesitate to contact your GP practice if you need to.</p> <p>Remember: be patient and #bekind</p>	<p>How is your GP practice working now?</p> <p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The practice may need to speak to you by phone to decide how best to help you. • Appointments may be triaged to make sure that people with the greatest need are seen first and that patients are seen by the most appropriate person. This may not necessarily be a GP. • Your appointment will be either face to face, by telephone or video depending on your healthcare need. • Please be assured that practices are doing what they can to manage their patients needs during a time of increased demand. 
<p>Ever wonder why the reception team ask so many questions when you call your GP practice?</p> <p>This this so you get the right care, in the right way, by the right professional. They are skilled in assisting with triage and treat all information in confidence.</p>	<p>Why does the receptionist at your GP practice ask so many personal questions?</p> <p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking questions means the reception team can direct you to the best support as quickly as possible. • They are skilled in assisting with triage and treat all information in confidence. They are a vital part of your GP practice. • Please respect them. Abuse of any kind is not acceptable. 
<p>Triage can help practice teams understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♥ Who is best to help you ♥ What type appointment best suits your needs ♥ Whether help from another health service is more appropriate. For example, a pharmacy or urgent treatment centre. 	<p>What is triage?</p> <p></p> <p>A trained health professional assesses your needs to decide how best to support you, they will consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is best to help you – a doctor, nurse, or other healthcare professional. • What kind of appointment is best – phone, video consultation or a face-to-face appointment. • Whether help from another health service is more appropriate – for example, a pharmacy or urgent treatment centre. 
<p>Get the help and care you need in a way that suits you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online 111.nhs.uk Call NHS 111 or your GP practice Confidential form from your practice website Download the #NHSApp 	<p>Where else can you get help other than your GP practice?</p> <p></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For advice on symptoms and a list of local services go to www.nhs.uk. If you are unsure what to do visit www.111.nhs.uk or call 111. • Your local pharmacist or optician can also advise on a wide variety of minor illnesses and provide treatments where needed. • If you need help with minor injuries or urgent care at any time you can get care at an urgent treatment centre. • Always dial 999 in a life-threatening emergency. 

