

Access to dental care in Hackney

WHEN, WHERE AND HOW?



healthwatch
Hackney

January 2022

Introduction

We appreciate the difficulties all health and care services have experienced since the start of the pandemic. We are grateful for their hard work and commitment to support and accommodate the needs of Hackney residents.

According to Healthwatch England, dentistry is now the number one issue patients raise concerns about. From April to June 2021, feedback received was up 55% on the previous three months, and 794% higher when compared with the same period in 2020. Nearly 4 in 5 people (79%) of respondents said they found it difficult to access timely care.

Healthwatch England Chair Sir Robert Francis QC said: “The Government needs to use the forthcoming spending review to provide vital investment in services like dentistry that help keep us all healthy and ensure we build back better for current and future generations.”

Healthwatch England has co-signed an [open letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer with the British Dental Association](#), highlighting the impact on patient care of a decade of cuts and over 30 million lost dental appointments since the first lockdown. In their letter, they have called for investment to underpin the recovery and the promised reform of NHS dentistry.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Healthwatch Hackney has also seen an increase in the number of people contacting us for information about accessing NHS dental care.

“I’ve called approximately 15 dentists from the NHS ‘find a dentist’ website and none are taking NHS patients.”

In October 2020, we [published a report](#) investigating access to dental care during COVID-19 and the impact of the pandemic on people’s dental care. This update:

- Highlights that many of the issues we have previously reported are unresolved
- Reviews the current availability of urgent and non-urgent dental care in Hackney
- Explores in more depth people's experience of accessing NHS dental care and treatment

Access to NHS dentistry continues to be the biggest issue for most people who contacted us. Common challenges people face include finding a dental surgery which is accepting new NHS patients and long waiting times for treatment. The unaffordability of private treatment has also been mentioned often.

Recommendations

In order to improve access to local dental care based on patient feedback and our observations, we would strongly recommend that:

Recommendations to the NHS England Commissioners for London

- The NHS Commissioner should ensure that every dental surgery in London checks and updates information on the NHS Find a Dentist website page at least every 90 days.
- The NHS Commissioner should ensure parity of esteem between NHS and private dental care and treatment, so that patients are never able to access dental care and treatment more quickly by paying for private treatment from a practice that is contracted to provide NHS care and treatment.
- NHS Commissioning of Dentistry should be transferred from NHS England to local Clinical Commissioning Groups/Integrated Care Systems.
- All dentists providing NHS care in Hackney should have a website with detailed information about the services provided, preventative dental care and a copy of Healthwatch Hackney's Complaints Charter.
- NHS Commissioners should require all NHS dental practices to have maximum waits for appointments for routine, urgent and emergency care for all patients that seek care and treatment from them.

Recommendations to patients

1. If after contacting several dental surgeries a resident still cannot find a dentist accepting NHS patients, they should call NHS England's Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 2233 (*see page 4 for more detail*)
2. If suffering from dental pain or other serious dental conditions patients should call 111 or go to the website: 111.nhs.uk

Recommendation for Healthwatch Hackney

- Follow up on the surgeries we were unable to reach during this research to make sure that they are communicating with patients and vice versa.

We have sought a response to our recommendations from **Jeremy Wallman**, Head of Primary Care Commissioning; Dentistry, Optometry and Pharmacy, NHS England and NHS Improvement - London Region.

Unfortunately, Jeremy was not able to respond due to the extra workload caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

As soon as we receive his response, we will be able to update the report.

Our aim

The main purpose of this review was to collect information on services to enable Healthwatch Hackney to respond to the many enquiries we receive about availability and access to dental care in Hackney.

We undertook a review to:

- assess the availability of all NHS-commissioned dental surgeries in Hackney to provide treatment to NHS patients on their list and new patients seeking treatment.
- determine levels of access to emergency dental care and options during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We wanted to find out about:

- the waiting times for non-urgent appointments for NHS patient already on a practice's list
- the waiting times for non-urgent appointments for private patients already on a practice's list
- accessibility/availability of care and treatment under the NHS for new patients. When is the first available appointment?
- accessibility/availability of care and treatment as a new private patient. When is the first available appointment?

Methodology

Between 1st of November and 23rd of December 2021 our staff and volunteers called the 27 dental surgeries in Hackney commissioned by the NHS, to identify the current services offered, whether they were accepting new NHS patients and the earliest date for a non-urgent routine appointment.

Staff/volunteers placing the calls introduced themselves and made it clear that they were calling from Healthwatch Hackney. Phone calls to all surgeries were undertaken on weekdays, in the mornings and the afternoons, between 9 am and 4 pm. Data collection sheets were provided for all calls to ensure as much consistency as possible in the information collected.

We asked the following questions:

- What is the waiting time for non-urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list e.g., regular check-up?
- What is the waiting time for non-urgent treatment for private patients already on the practice list e.g., regular check-up?
- What is the waiting time for urgent appointments for NHS patients already on the surgery's list?
- What is the waiting time for urgent appointments for private patients already on the surgery's list?

- Is the surgery accepting new NHS patients and if yes, when might be the first available date for a non-urgent appointment?
- Is the surgery accepting new private patients and if yes, when might be the first available date for a non-urgent appointment?
- Where would patients be signposted to if unable to be seen by the surgery?
- Is the surgery working regular working hours?

We also analysed data received from different routes between October 2021 and November 2021 using the following keywords:

#Registration, #Registering, #Cost, #Afford, #Money, #Private, #NHS dentist, #NHS care, #Access, #Available, #Phone, #Call.

We also reviewed the websites and the pages of 27 local dental surgeries on the [Find a dentist](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist) - NHS services pages at: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist> to find out what information is provided on new NHS patient take-up.

Our team

A small project team was assembled to undertake this project comprised of Healthwatch Hackney staff and volunteers.

Individual meetings were held to brief team members on the project, provide a full understanding of the objectives and methods to be used, and allow familiarisation with the supporting documentation.

Healthwatch Hackney undertook the review during November and December 2021 across 27 dental surgeries in Hackney.

Limitations

We were unable to reach 5 out of 27 dental surgeries in Hackney due to their busy working schedule as well as the festive season closure.

Some staff members were not able to give an estimated waiting time for treatment due to staff illness (including dentists) and uncertainty around the new NHS contract arrangements, which are due to be reviewed.

Acknowledgment

Healthwatch Hackney would like to thank our volunteers Miranda Cobbs, Sarah Nsuguba and Jack Sayers for their support with this project.

We would also like to thank the staff from all the dental surgeries for their time and the information they provided. During the phone calls we made, every member of staff we spoke to was very polite and understanding.

Key findings from our phone calls to dental surgeries

- 13 (59%) dental surgeries in Hackney were not ready to accept new NHS patients for non-urgent treatment because of the COVID-19 backlog and pressures on their services
- 7 (32%) surgeries were accepting new NHS patients The waiting time for the first appointment varied from 2 weeks to one or two years
- 14 (70%) surgeries were ready to accept new private patients and in some cases were able to see the new patient within a week.
- Surgeries that were not able to see new or existing patients in a timely manner would signpost or refer them to NHS 111 or [NHS Find a Dentist](#) website
- Most surgeries were able to offer urgent appointments the same or the next day to NHS patients already on their list after a telephone triage.
- Most surgeries were prioritising urgent cases from their current patient list, both NHS and private
- Some surgeries told us that they received many calls from new patients unable to get treatment elsewhere
- A dentist in one surgery told us that a patient is accepted as being on their list if s/he had been with them for at least 2 years. Otherwise, patients could be removed and not classified as a patient of the surgery.
- All surgeries were working regular working hours, however, two surgeries said that sometimes they extend the hours if there was an urgent case.

Findings from the NHS [Find a dentist](#) website review

We found that out of 27 NHS dental practices in Hackney:

- 81% (22/27) of surgeries investigated had not provided up to date information on the provision of care and treatment to new NHS patients i.e. within the last 90 days
- 3 surgeries were not accepting any new NHS patients
- 2 surgeries were only accepting patients after a referral, e.g. from 111.

It is important that dental surgeries update their page on the [Find a dentist](#) - NHS services website with accurate information about their opening times, availability of appointments for dental care, as well as any special care and facilities available at the surgery.

Existing or new patients can also leave reviews and ratings on the Find a dentist pages.

Key findings from patient feedback

- Many people continue to struggle to access NHS dental treatment or to afford private treatment.
- Lack of information or poor information on surgeries' websites left people unsure if dentists are taking on new patients or offering routine care.

"It says on their website that they take on NHS patients, but when I called and asked, they said they were not acceting new patients and quickly hung up the phone."

" I am pregnant, and need to see a dentist as I think I need a filling. I've been with the surgery for three years. They did not make it clear on their website that they are not taking existing patients for routine examinations. The website has great directions for finding the surgery, and how to attend during COVID, but does say that there are no routine appointments until the end of the January 2022 at the earliest. Not sure what I'm supposed to do now that the dentists taking on new NHS patients don't seem to exist."

- Residents often contacted us because they did not know which NHS dentists had started to do routine check-ups and/or if any were taking on new patients.

"I was hoping you could help me - I've called approximately 15 dentists from the NHS dentist search directory and none are taking NHS patients. I have extensive dental problems and daily dental pain and really would like to see a dentist to start tackling my issues - I also have severe anxiety, so have been struggling to call them in the first instance at all. After managing to call so many and get nowhere I was wondering if you had any advice on who'll take me? "

- Pressure to go private: some patients have felt pressured to go private as dentists said that they could not provide NHS treatments but were able to do so if people were willing to pay private fees.

"Last year, I switched dentist from near my old office to a local dentist in Hackney. I never actually attended the new dentist, due to COVID backlogs. I have recently contacted them to arrange my first appointment, but they're insisting I pay privately (even though I'm in their NHS list)."

Unable to join the list as an NHS patient for over 2 weeks and in need of urgent root canal treatment. The dentist quoted over £1000 for private treatment.

The NHS suggests that if after contacting several dental surgeries you still cannot *find a dentist* accepting NHS patients, call NHS England's Customer Contact Centre on 0300 311 2233.

- Long waiting times. People are being asked to wait anywhere between a few months and three years to get an NHS appointment - some cannot even get on a waiting list.

“My daughter has been taken off our dentist’s list because she didn’t use their services over the last 6 months and they can’t take her take her back as their list is full and those on the waiting list are too many.”

“Just moved into the area, and as I walked past this dentist, on the window they advertise ‘we are now accepting new patients’. I called their number to request to make an appointment as they are only 10 seconds from me. I was told that: ‘we are not accepting new patients’. I requested to be added to their waiting list... was told: “no, we don’t keep a waiting list, you will need to call us every day.”

- Unable to afford private treatment, leaving patients unable to see a dentist.

“Not able to find a dentist to accept new NHS patients. Have been to 111 and an emergency hub and was told that I will need at least 5 visits to the dentist for treatment. The private offer was too expensive.”

“I need an appointment for my son who is 6 years old. We have been to a private dentist, non-NHS, and they suggested he needs 5 fillings and 4 sealants. But I can simply not afford a private dentist. And he needs the treatments as soon as possible as we have been delaying it for 3 months now because of Coronavirus.”

- Some patients have found that when they have tried to book a dental appointment, they have been removed from their practice list.

“... These people took me and my kids off their patients list without even notifying me of this. Luckily, I found a new dentist the same day, however, it was not easy. I had been with that dentist since my 12-year-old was a baby and they just took us off just like that, no warning, no notification... nothing.”

“ My daughter is at Uni and was previously with the local dentist. However, she had an urgent issue and when we called the dentist they said she has been taken off the list because she hadn’t used their services for the last 6 months.”

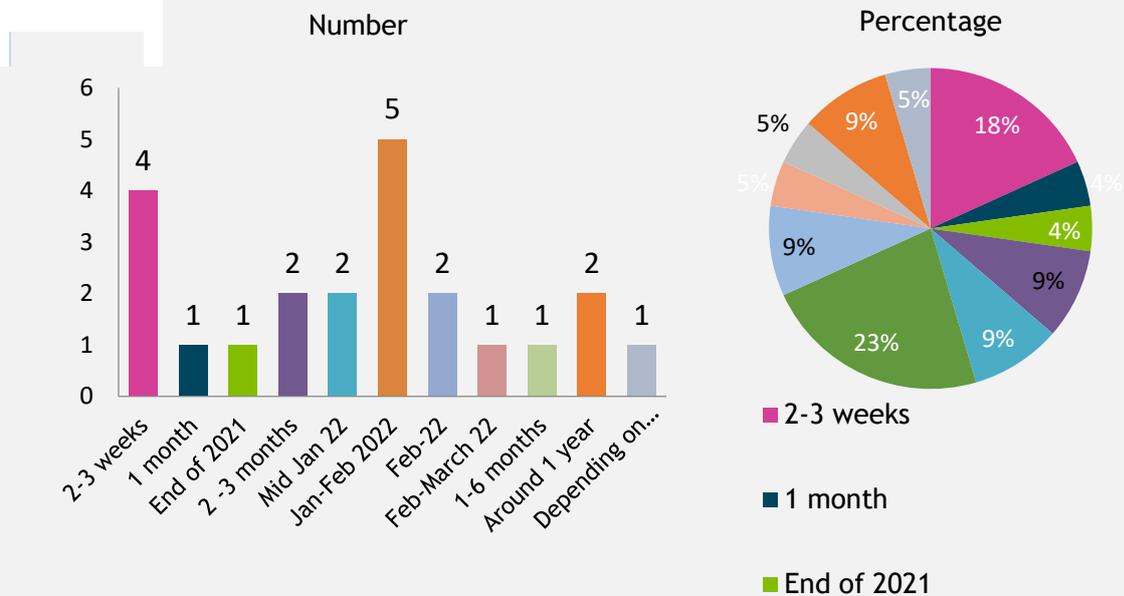
Dental surgeries are not bound to a catchment area. Therefore, you can join any dental surgery. Simply find a dental surgery that’s convenient for you, whether it’s near your home or work, and phone them to see if there are any appointments available.

To find an NHS dentist go to <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

Analysis of data collected in November and December 2021

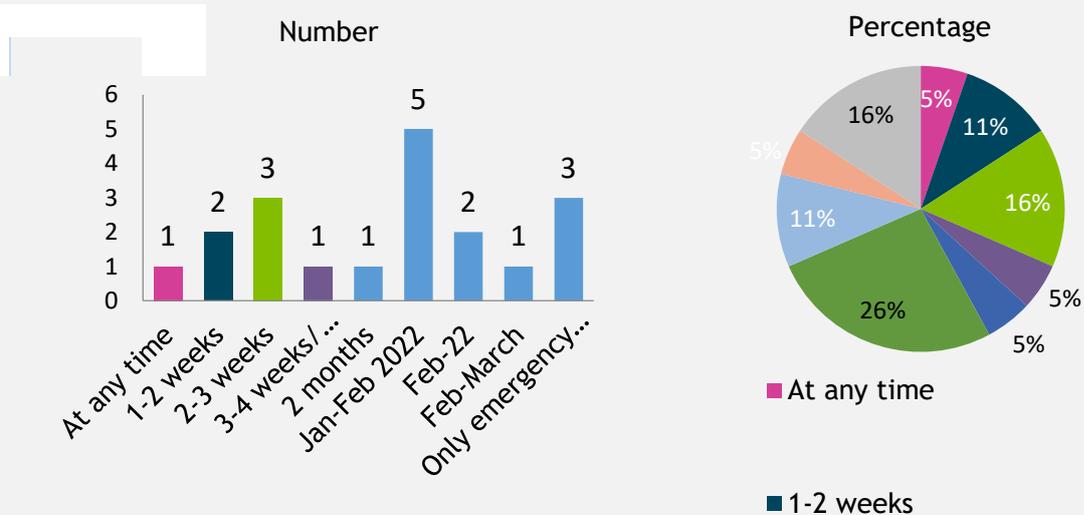
The data presented below details the results of the research.

What is the waiting time for non-urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list e.g., regular check-up?



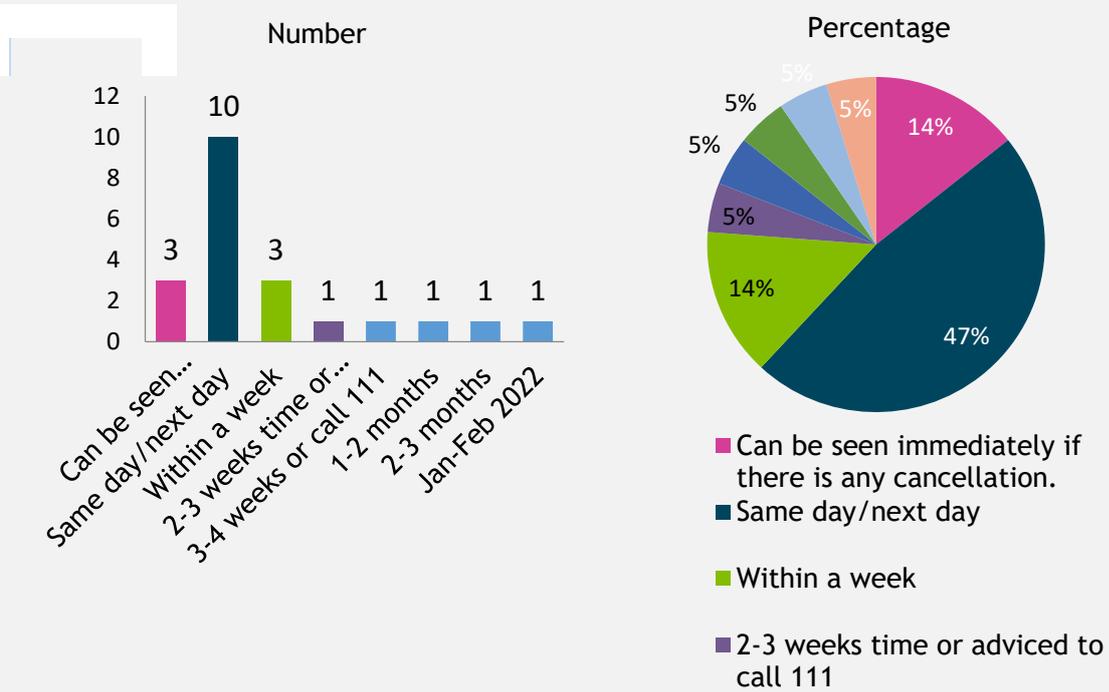
Sample: 22 *For detailed information see pages 12,13,14, 15*

What is the waiting time for non-urgent treatment for private patients already on the practice list e.g., regular check-up?



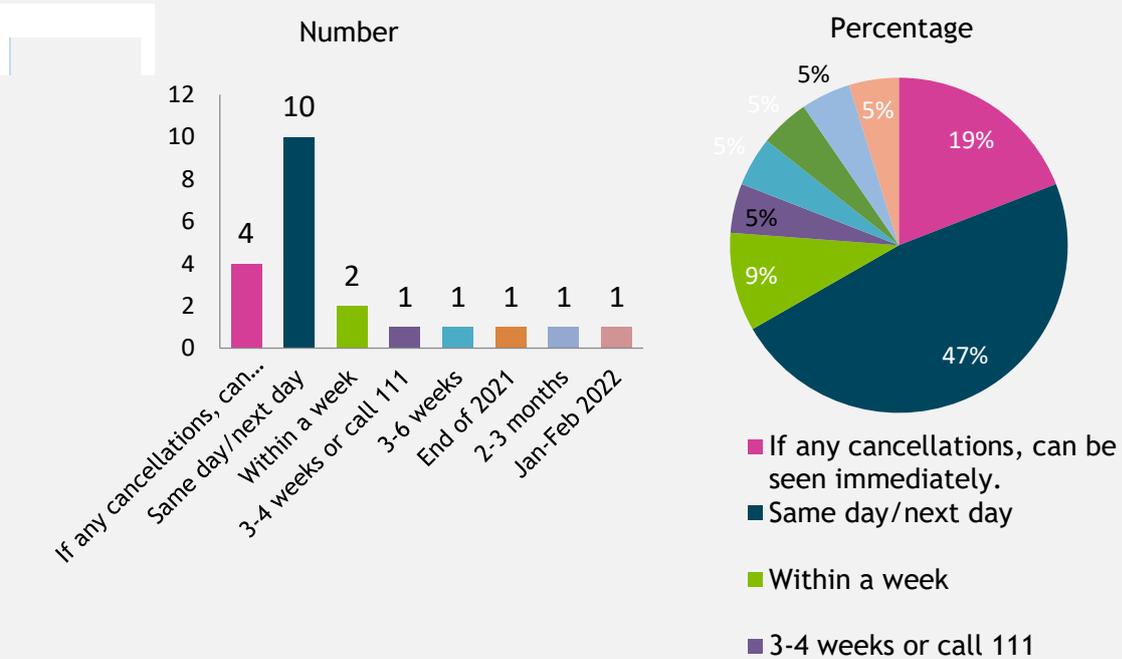
Sample: 19

What is the waiting time for urgent appointments for NHS patients already on the surgery's list?



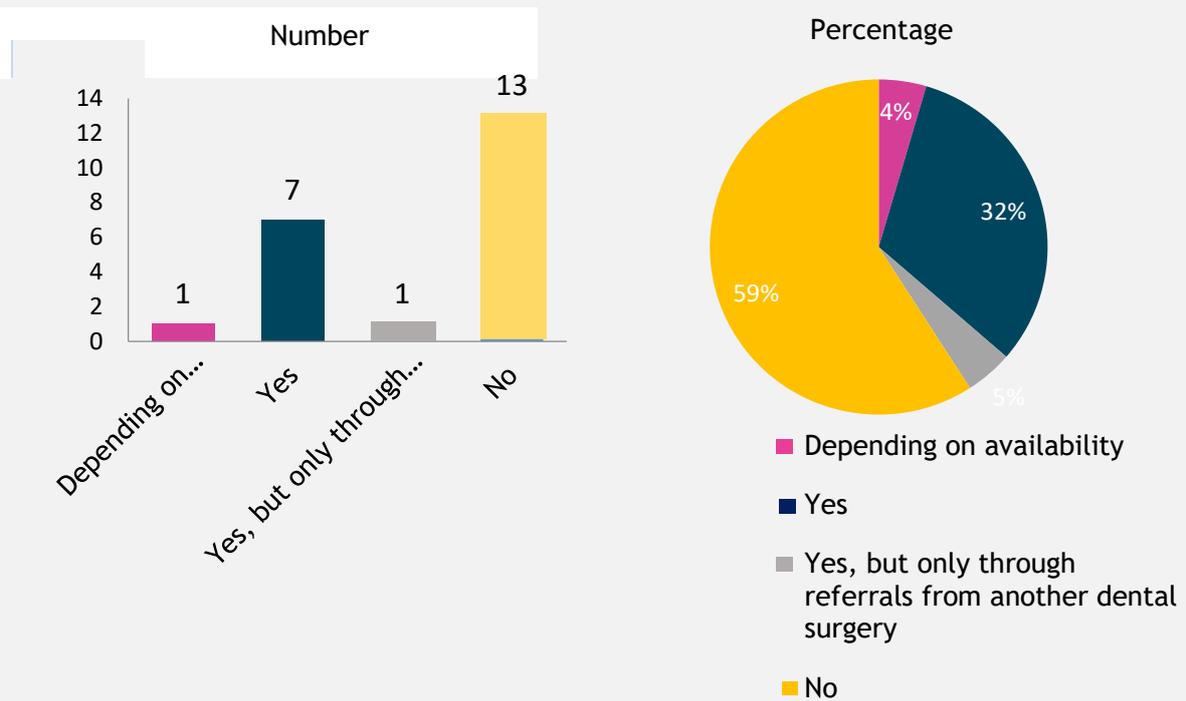
Sample: 21

What is the waiting time for urgent appointments for private patients already on the surgery's list?

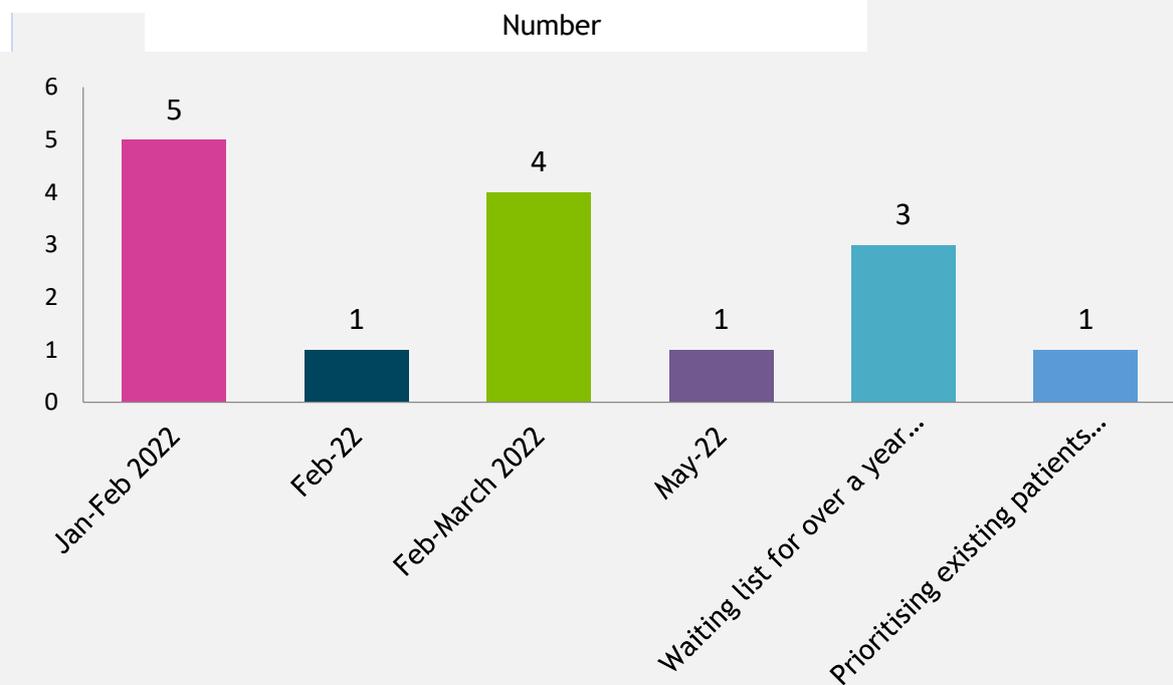


Sample: 21

Is the surgery accepting new NHS patients?

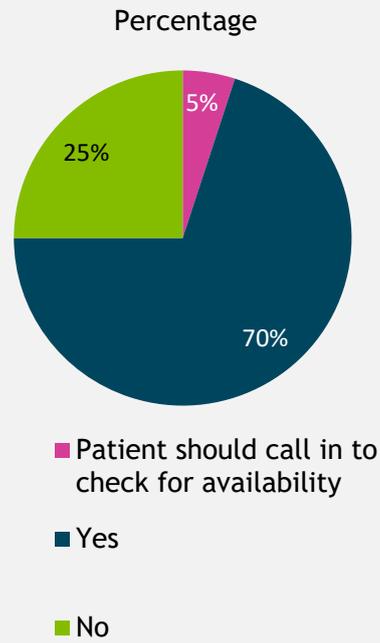
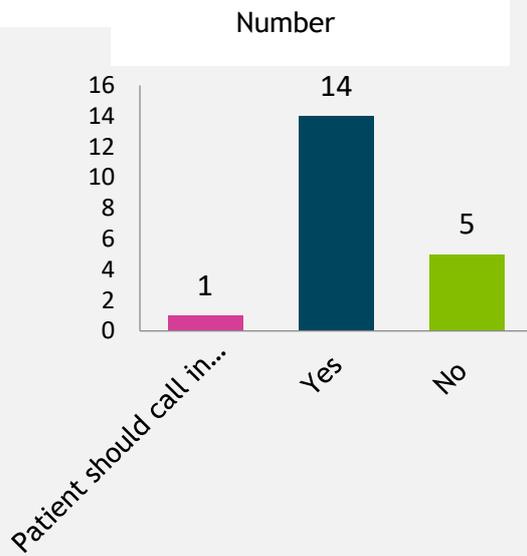


If the surgery is accepting new NHS patients when might be the first available date for a non-urgent appointment?



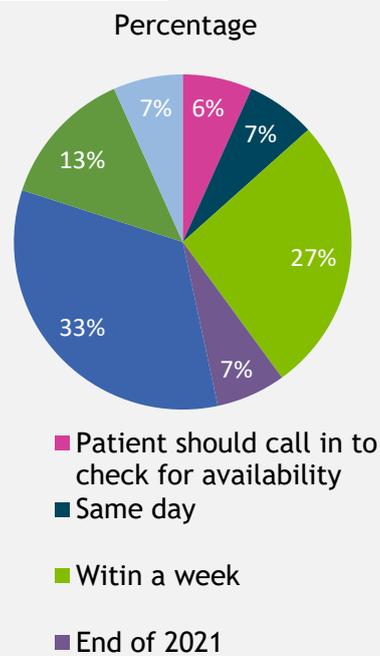
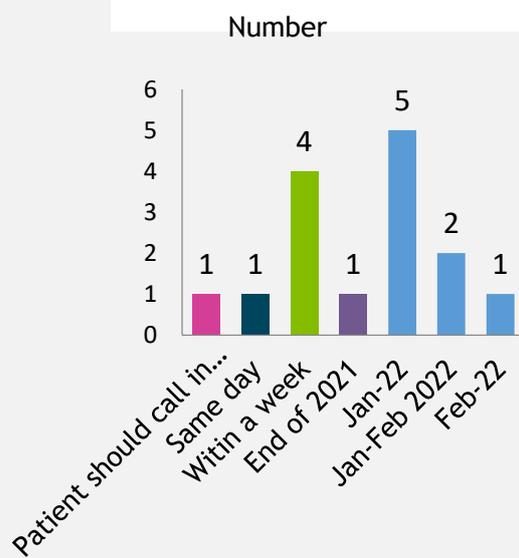
Sample: 17 *For detailed information see pages 12,13,14, 15*

Is the surgery accepting new private patients?



Sample: 20

If the surgery accepts new private patients, what is the waiting time for a non-urgent appointment?



Sample: 17

Data was collected between November and December 2021

Dental surgery's name	Dental surgery's contact number	Dental surgery's address	What is the waiting time for non-urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list e.g. regular check-ups?	What is the waiting time for urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list?	Is the surgery accepting new NHS patients at the moment?	If the surgery is accepting new NHS patients when might be the first available date for a non-urgent appointment?
Hackney Dental Practice	020 8533 0816	319a Mare Street, Hackney, London, E8 1EJ	1-6 months. It depends on the availability	2-3 weeks or advised to call 111	Depending on the availability	Patient should call in to check for availability
E8 Dental Care	020 8985 4547	E8 Dental Care, 380a Mare Street, Hackney, London, E8 1HR	Feb-22	Can be seen immediately if there is any cancellation.	Yes	Feb-22
City Smile	020 7739 4275	37-39 Mare Street, London, E8 4RP	1 month	Same day/next day	Yes	3-4 weeks
The Dental Surgery	020 8533 1353	257c Mare Street, Hackney, London, E8 3NS	1 year	Same day/next day	No	Waiting list/1 year
Kumar S. Sehgal/ Lower Clapton Dental Surgery	020 8985 2490	84 Lower Clapton Road, Clapton, London, E5 0RN	End of 2021	Same day/next day	No	End of 2021
Homerton Dental Care	020 8985 6650	Homerton Dental Care, 177 Homerton High Street, Homerton, London, E9 6BB	Between 2-3 weeks	Less than 1 week	No	
Dental Beauty	020 7254 0898	33 Kingsland High Street, Hackney, London, E8 2JS	2-3 weeks	Same day/next day	Yes	Jan-Feb 2022

Dental surgery's name	Dental surgery's contact number	Dental surgery's address	What is waiting time for non-urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list e.g. regular check-up?	What is the waiting time for urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list?	Is the surgery accepting new NHS patients at the moment?	If the surgery is accepting new NHS patients when might be the first available date for a non-urgent appointment?
Clapton Dental Surgery	020 8986 5717	Clapton Dental Surgery, 83 Chatsworth Road, Clapton, London, E5 0LH	2 -3 months	Same day/next day	No	May-22
Stoke Newington Dental Practice	020 7254 7542	83 Stoke Newington High Street, London, N16 8EL	1-2 months/ 15 Jan	1-2 months	No	Feb-March
Stoke Newington Dental Clinic	020 7254 6503	169 Church Street, Hackney, London, N16 0UL	Jan-Feb 2022	Same day/next day telephone consultation	No	Feb-March
Bradbury Dental Surgery	020 7254 7322	18 Bradbury Street, Dalston, London, N16 8JN	Feb-March	Same day/next day	No	Over a year
Abney Dental Practice	020 7249 2939	230-240 Stoke Newington High St, Stoke Newington, London N16 7HU	Mid Feb	3-4 weeks or call 111	No	Feb-March
Manor Orthodontics	0208 800 8581	48 Woodberry Grove, Woodberry Down, London N4 1SN	Jan-Feb 2022	Within a week	Yes, but only through referrals from a dental practice	NA
Dent Essentials	020 7613 3399	75 Curtain Road, Shoreditch, London, London, EC2A 3BS	Depending on d availability, can be seen on the same or next day		Yes	Jan-22
Kingsland Dental Surgery	020 7254 7520	537 Kingsland Road, Hackney, London, E8 4AR	Jan-Feb 2022	Same day/next day	Yes	April 2022

Dental surgery's name	Dental surgery's contact number	Dental surgery's address	What is waiting time for non-urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list e.g. regular check-up?	What is the waiting time for urgent treatment for NHS patients already on the surgery's list?	Is the surgery accepting new NHS patients at the moment?	If the surgery is accepting new NHS patients when might be the first available date for a non-urgent appointment?
Nile Street Dental Practice	020 7253 6454	77 Nile Street, Hackney, London, N1 7RD	The second week of Jan 22	Depending on the availability or will advise you to call 111	No	Priority was given to patients from last year. New patients will be added to a waiting list.
Upper Clapton Dental Surgery	020 8806 0106	77 Upper Clapton Road, Clapton, London, E5 9BU	Jan-Feb 2022	2-3 months	No	Jan-Feb 2022
Woodberry Down Dental Practice /Mr. Neil Shah Dental Surgeon	020 8800 2244	307 Seven Sisters Road, Manor House, London, N4 1QR	2 months	Same day/next day	Yes	Jan-Feb 2022
Cosmo Dental Surgery	020 7739 6574	167-169 Kingsland Road London E2 8AL	2/3 weeks	Same day/next day	No	Feb-March
Well Street Dental Surgery	020 8985 9828	220 Well Street, Hackney, London, E9 6QT	Jan-Feb 2022	Jan-Feb 2022	No	Jan-Feb 2022
Davidoff Dental Surgery	020 8800 0674	103 Stamford Hill, Hackney, London, N16 5TR	9/10 month	Will try to fit them in asap or 111	No	Waiting list for year or two
Trinity Dental Care	020 8985 4434	167 Clarence Road, Hackney, London, E5 8EE	2 weeks	Within a week	Yes	2 weeks

Dental surgeries we were unable to reach during the review in November and December 2021

Dental surgery's name	Dental surgery's contact number	Dental surgery's address	The reason
St Leonard's Dental Practice / <u>Community Dental Service</u>	0300 123 9277	St. Leonard's Special Care Dental Practice, 1st Floor, B Block, Nuttall Street, London, N1 5LZ	Not answering the calls. Calls were made on 15 November and 30 th November
<u>Orchid Dental Care</u>	020 7241 4161	Orchid Dental Care, 1 Balls Pond Road, London, N1 4AX	Not answering the calls. Calls were made on 10 November and 23 rd December
Smile and Shine Dental Practice / Mr. Daneshi Sadoh Dental Practitioner	020 8800 5080	288 Seven Sisters Road, London, N4 2AA	Not answering the calls. Only option was given to record messages for bookings. Calls were made on 10 November and 23 rd December
EC1 Dental Practice	<u>020 7739 2553</u>	344 Old St, London EC1V 9DS	Not answering the calls. Calls were made on 15 November and 23 rd December
Barbican Dental Centre	0207 253 3232	16-18 Goswell Rd, Barbican, London EC1M 7AA	Not answering the call. Calls were made on 22 nd and 23 rd December

Useful information

How do I find a dentist?

The easiest way to find an NHS dentist near you is to search online for dental practices near your postcode. This will show you all dental practices in the area, not only those providing NHS dental services.

To find practices which do offer NHS dental services the best place to look is on the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>.

You can also look on this NHS webpage and fill in the search boxes <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services>

There are no area restrictions on accessing NHS dental services. You can visit a practice wherever is most convenient to you.

What is the difference between NHS or private availability?

Practices may not be able to offer you an immediate NHS appointment but will be able to offer an appointment at some point. Practices may instead be able to offer an appointment privately at shorter notice. This is because the NHS does not own or run the practice, but contracts the practice to deliver a specific amount of NHS care in an area. The amount of care provided on the NHS is limited to a yearly amount, which is spread as evenly as possible throughout the year. The number of available appointments for NHS care varies from practice to practice and most will also provide private care. NHS appointments may get booked up quickly which can leave only private appointments available for quick access.

Do I need to register with a dental practice?

There is no registration at an NHS dental practice, but the term is still often used as it is one that people are familiar with. If you go to practice regularly and make an appointment after your last appointment the practice will consider you a regular patient. If you have not been to that practice for several years, the practice may not consider you one of their patients. When you attend a practice for the first time you will have to fill in some forms. This is not an NHS registration form. The information helps the dentist understand your needs and what treatments may be suitable.

When you leave the practice you should make another appointment in the timeframe recommended. If you do not, then the practice may consider the relationship to have ended.

What is the difference between NHS and private treatments?

It should be clear to you when you make an appointment whether your appointment is as an NHS patient or as a private patient. If it is not clear, please ask.

The NHS contracts dentists to provide all treatments that are clinically necessary for the maintenance of good oral health. Your dentist will discuss your clinical requirements with you and explain which treatments are available under the NHS and which are available privately only.

There are different levels of complexity of some treatments and practices may refer more complex cases to colleagues with specific contracts to deliver these more complex treatments.

More information about what dental treatments are available on the NHS are available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/what-dental-services-are-available-on-the-nhs/>

What are the NHS costs and exemptions from charges available?

Most people have to pay NHS dental charges. These charges are set by the NHS every year. There are three possible charges you could pay for NHS primary dental care, depending on what treatment you have. More detail about NHS Charge for primary care dentistry are available on the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/understanding-nhs-dental-charges>

The dental practice website should also have information about NHS charges, and any private charges for private services they offer.

To check if you are eligible for exemption from NHS primary care dental charges you can use this online tool:

<https://services.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/check-my-nhs-exemption/start>

The NHS website also has a list of people who do not have to pay NHS primary care dental charges: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/get-help-with-dental-costs>

Practices will not be able to advise you on your exemption status.

How do I get dental care at home?

A general dental practice, a high street dental practice, will not be able to provide home visits on the NHS¹. Practices are unable to provide NHS care outside of the practice setting. They may provide home visits privately, however.

If a home visit is required because the patient is unable to leave their home, they will be able to access care from the Community Dental Services. These can be accessed following a referral from a dental practice. This is also the case for residents of care homes, and the care home should be able to arrange a visit from the Community Dental Services.

Access for babies and very young children

It is advised that new parents take their newborn to a dentist for their first check-up before their first birthday to receive preventive advice from a very young age and improve dental health. The Dental Check by One website has further information about this and also about how this initiative has been affected by the current pandemic: <https://dentalcheckbyone.co.uk>.

Further information:

The NHS Business Services Authority (BSA) has further information for patients about NHS dental services: <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/information-patients>

The Oral Health Foundation has information about oral health for patients: <https://www.dentalhealth.org>

¹ There are a small number of practices with NHS contracts allowing them to do so but these are rare and have very limited capacity.