



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

From Jo Churchill MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Primary Care and Health Promotion

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Debbie Abrahams MP  
By email to: [abrahamsd@parliament.uk](mailto:abrahamsd@parliament.uk)

6 August 2021

Dear Debbie,

Thank you for your correspondence of 2 June on behalf of your constituent, Mr Tamoor Tariq of Healthwatch Oldham, about access to dental services. I apologise for the delay replying, which has been caused by an unprecedented volume of correspondence in recent months.

I was very sorry to read of the difficulties experienced by Oldham constituents in accessing dental care. This is an important issue and I recognise that this situation has caused Mr Tariq a great deal of concern.

I would like to reassure Mr Tariq that all practices are now open and providing face-to-face care. However, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, access to routine dental care is currently limited while dental practices concentrate on managing those patients with the most urgent needs.

A few practices are still not able to provide treatment involving aerosol-generating procedures such as fillings, root treatment, crown preparation or scale and polish. However, where appropriate, dentists can refer these patients to urgent dental care centres.

Dental practices are working hard to see as many patients as they can, but need to prioritise those patients who require urgent dental care and those who were already in a course of treatment before practices closed.

If a person has an urgent need, they can contact any NHS dental practice that can perform a telephone assessment, provide advice on pain relief and prescribe antibiotics where clinically indicated. They will offer a face-to-face appointment where a triage consultation determines it is clinically necessary. It is important to note that when contacting a practice, patients should let their dentist know that they have an urgent need and are not seeking routine care at this stage, to avoid any misunderstanding; it is also worth advising the practice if they have already had a number of courses of antibiotics for this problem, despite which the issue persists.

Local dental helplines provide details of local dental practices providing NHS care, and this information can be found at [www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist).

NHS England requires practices to provide the same number of hours for NHS treatment as before the pandemic. However, where this capacity is used up, practices may then offer treatment privately to patients.

We recognise there is more we can do to improve dental services and ensure that patients are able to access the care they need. The Chief Dental Officer and NHS England are also looking closely at how NHS activity can support our wider work to tackle health inequalities by focusing activity on those in greatest need of treatment.

We are taking steps to improve the recruitment and retention of dentists by:

- improving career pathways through Health Education England's (HEE's) Advancing Dental Care programme;
- reforming the current dental contract to make the NHS more attractive for the dental profession; and
- using NHS England's flexible commissioning framework, which is allowing for a greater use of the skill mix of all disciplines within the dental team, with the aim of creating a capable and motivated multidisciplinary workforce.

We will continue to work with HEE to ensure we have the data to support future workforce planning and address shortages of dental professionals in some areas and clinical specialties, through local sustainability transformation partnerships and integrated care systems.

I hope this reply is helpful to Mr Tariq.

**JO CHURCHILL**