

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

It is very important that patients seeking help do **not** visit A&E departments or GP surgeries for dental care. Emergency care related to dental issues will only be provided by A&E departments if there are life threatening issues such as uncontrollable bleeding, swelling affecting the airways etc.

Although Dental Practices are now open, access to routine dental care is extremely limited due to the essential safety measures in place to protect both patients and staff and a reduction in the capacity to treat patients as a result of this. Enhanced infection prevention requirements include the need to leave each surgery empty for up to an hour between patients. There is clear guidance to practices on risk assessing patients and prioritising those with an urgent need.

Commissioners have been working with NHS 111, local practices and with our Urgent Dental Care system to ensure that asylum seekers can access services in the same way as other patients. It is not however possible to prioritise routine checks for this group over more urgent clinical need for other patients.

There are currently over 80 operational urgent dental centres (UDCs) across the Midlands for patients with no Covid-19 symptoms. In addition, there are also a small number of separate sites for patients who are possible or confirmed Covid-19 patients, including those living in their households. Some of these sites are specialist sites for those who are medically vulnerable (at high risk of Covid-19 illness) or shielded patients. These sites continue to operate to ensure access to urgent dental services for any patient who is unable to be seen by a local practice.

Please note that for patient safety purposes, patients will be asked whether they have any Covid-19 symptoms (i.e. temperature and dry cough), are self-isolating or in a medically vulnerable or shielded group. It should also be noted that no patient walk in services are available in order to reduce transmission risk.

For doctors / third sector colleagues/ others supporting this vulnerable group the routes into dental care are as follows:

Monday to Friday: 9am to 5pm

Phone the patient's dental practice (if they have one) or the nearest dental practice (to find an NHS dentist: <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/dentists/how-to-find-an-nhs-dentist/>) for information and advice on alternative arrangements in place. They can also use NHS 111 (phone or online) who will be able to signpost on to a practice who will provide a telephone assessment and face to face treatment or onward referral if required.

Evenings after 5pm, weekends and bank holidays

Contact NHS 111 (phone or online) and appropriate referrals will be made, as required.

NHS111 will direct the patient in hours to a local dental practice for an initial telephone based dental triage. If following the initial triage, the patient requires urgent dental treatment which the practice is unable to provide, the patient will be referred on to a local Urgent Dental Centre (UDC). In the out of hours period, NHS111 will refer directly to the Out of Hours or Extended hours providers who are open.

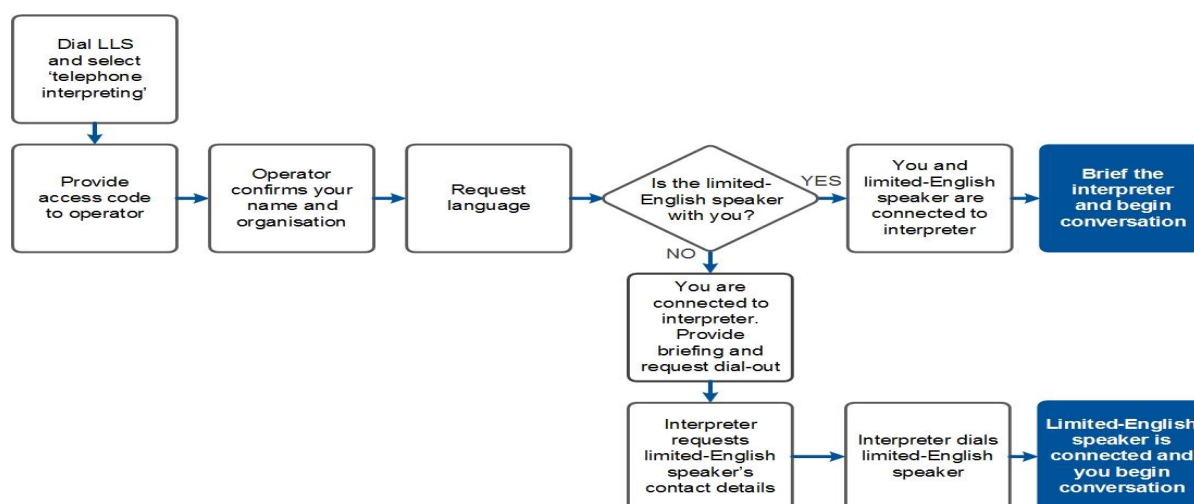
It should be noted that for patients with an orthodontic need, they are unlikely to be able to continue with routine treatment started privately abroad unless it is clear that they previously met, or currently meet, the criteria for NHS care which, in most cases, is provided for under 18s only. In all cases support can be provided to address urgent issues such as where a broken wire is causing pain or where arrangements need to be made with a local practice to remove braces. Continuation of orthodontic treatment that does not meet NHS criteria is likely to be available on a private basis only.

Interpretation services available via Language Line

For refugees or asylum seekers experiencing language barriers, NHS 111, general dental practices and the Urgent Dental Care Centres can access a direct dial-out facility within a telephone interpreting service. This service enables dentists and nurses to call a patient directly on their phone at any time of the day through an interpreter.

Through this service the interpreter initiates a conversation when the patient answers their phone thus avoiding any potential confusion and enabling the health professional to comfortably start and continue the conversation remotely. This service does not need to be pre-booked; it is available and used 'on-demand' and will also be used by Urgent Dental Care centres. If the patient needs to be seen they will be informed that they will not be able to bring a translator escort with them to the appointment due to the safety arrangements in place.

Here is a simple flow diagram:



NHS dental charges

NHS dental care is free for all children (regardless of immigration status) up to the age of 18 years (or 19 years, if in full-time education).

All adult refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to emergency dental care, but they will have to pay dental charges unless they have evidence of exemption (e.g. proof of benefits or valid HC2/HC3 certificate).

Adult refugees may be entitled to free NHS dental care if they are claiming certain benefits i.e. Income Support, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, Universal Credit (in certain circumstances).

The patient must show documentary evidence of valid exemptions. If this cannot be provided, they will be asked to pay NHS dental charges.

Adult asylum and refused asylum seekers are not eligible to claim benefits but can apply for the NHS Low Income Scheme using the HC1 form to gain full exemption (HC2 certificate) or partial exemption (HC3 certificate) from costs.

NHS dental treatment

There is no formal requirement to prove identity or immigration status in order to access NHS dental care.

If a patient does not have a fixed address, they are still entitled to NHS dental care: the dental practice will use their address on the dental claim form (FP17).