

Patients to benefit from improved access to dental appointments

24.2.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Patients across the country will have better access to NHS dentistry, boosting earlier intervention, prevention and continuity of care.

- New figures show government is on track to deliver millions more dental appointments this year, with 1.8 million additional treatments already delivered 7 months in
- Broadening scope of extra urgent appointments will increase access to NHS dental treatment boosting earlier intervention, prevention and continuity of care
- Alongside dental reforms that prioritise those with the greatest need and pioneering supervised toothbrushing programme

Patients are benefiting from millions more dental appointments, as new figures show the NHS delivered 1.8 million additional dental treatments in just 7 months.

Following calls from the country's top dentist, the government will expand access to dentistry.

The government pledged to deliver 700,000 extra urgent dental appointments and integrated care boards (ICBs) have commissioned nearly one million appointments in line with this commitment.

The Chief Dental Officer has said the scope of these extra urgent appointments is too narrow and limits cases to the clinical definition of 'urgent'.

Patients with serious oral health issues are not eligible for these extra appointments, as their issues are not considered clinically 'urgent'.

Issues like tooth decay or rotting teeth would not automatically be eligible for an urgent appointment.

Shocking reports show that some patients are performing DIY dentistry, pulling out loose teeth themselves due to lack of access.

Following advice from the Chief Dental Officer, the government is today (20 February 2026) broadening the scope of the target to include all dental appointments, helping many more patients get the dentist appointment they're chasing.

Through this change and alongside reforms to the dental contract, it is expected that millions more appointments will be delivered, and children and those most in need benefiting most.

Minister for Health, Stephen Kinnock, said:

Nobody should be pushed to such a state of desperation that they're forced to pull their own teeth out, but there are far too many cases of this happening and it's totally unacceptable.

The idea that a patient in this terrible position may not qualify for an 'urgent' appointment is clearly nonsensical, so we're acting to rectify this absurd situation.

Thanks to the changes we're making, millions more appointments will be delivered this year, with children and those in the greatest need benefiting most.

After more than a decade of decline, we're putting NHS dentistry on the road to recovery.

Jason Wong, Chief Dental Officer for England, said:

Widening access to include other oral healthcare beyond urgent care means more patients will be seen quickly and get the care they need before problems escalate.

By working closely with government and the dental sector to bring in these changes, we are delivering on the manifesto commitment to make prevention a priority and helping people maintain good oral health.

Monthly National Dental Activity data published on 19 February 2026 shows that in 2025, the NHS delivered an extra 1.8 million courses of dental treatment over the first 7 months of 2025 to 2026 compared to the period in the year up to the general election.

By broadening the scope to include all appointments - not just those fitting the existing narrow definition of 'urgent' - ICBs will be able to offer more dental care for more patients, including children and those with serious issues.

All ICBs are required to provide accessible urgent care and have been commissioning additional urgent care capacity since April.

Local areas will have the power to determine what dental appointments best meet the needs of their local communities and may be able to repurpose or recommission services where needed.

From April 2026, high street dentists will also be required to offer a minimum number of urgent or unscheduled appointments, which could include patients who are new to the practice, further boosting access to NHS dentistry.

This comes alongside the government's pioneering national supervised toothbrushing programme for 3 to 5 year olds, which will support up to 600,000 children this year, with over 4 million toothbrushes and toothpastes delivered already as well as community water fluoridation schemes proven to reduce decay.

Through the 10 Year Health Plan this government is making dentistry fit for the future, boosting the number of dentists through reforming the dental contract and fundamentally shifting dental care from sickness to prevention.

Neil Carmichael, Association of Dental Groups (ADG) Executive Chair, said:

The progress made in the delivery of dental appointments is fantastic to hear. ADG has been aware since the announcement of the 700,000 urgent appointments that some patients have been struggling to understand what was meant by the definition of 'urgent treatment', so these efforts to provide clarification will be welcomed by our members.

We need to come together now as a profession to support this intervention to succeed,

and the ADG recommends that ICBs should act quickly now to implement these changes in their local areas, so patients benefit.

We must also address the issue that we will not meet patients' needs until we increase the dental workforce. Currently the gap in our dental teams is massive.

Shiv Pabary, Chair of the British Dental Association's General Dental Practice Committee, said:

This uptick in activity is progress, and reflects the commitment of thousands of dentists who have continued to deliver NHS care against all odds.

But millions are still going without care. After years of savage cuts, ending this crisis will hinge on promised reform being backed by sustainable funding.

The government must build on this progress with urgency and ambition. To give NHS dentistry a future, we need a response proportionate to the challenges we face.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/patients-to-benefit-from-improved-access-to-dental-appointments>