

To: All NI GDPs

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Dear Colleague

Arrangements for high risk (i.e. potential/confirmed Covid positive) patients with an urgent dental care need

The marked rise in GDS activity beginning in late June 2020 brought with it a significant reduction in demand for care at the Urgent Dental Care Centres (UDCCs). As you will know from my letter of 21 August, the UDCCs have reduced their capacity to reflect this reduction in demand so that currently a weekend only service is provided. However, the recent dramatic rise in the number of confirmed Covid positive cases and a concomitant increase in the number of Covid positive patients referred to the UDCCs mean that it is necessary to add some weekday capacity to the current arrangements.

To that end, the Health and Social Care Board has secured evening treatment sessions in Dalriada Urgent Care (DUC) on Tuesdays and Thursdays commencing next week (w/c 12 October 2020) for confirmed or suspected Covid positive patients meeting the urgent dental care criteria. The weekend service at the UDCCs will continue to accept patients meeting the urgent dental care criteria who are unable to be seen within the GDS as before.

Please ensure that all patients are screened prior to attending for a dental appointment at your practice using the screening questions outlined in section 4.2 of the Operational Guidance (for convenience section 4.2 has been appended to this letter). Patients who following screening are identified as high risk should not enter your dental practice. If the patient presents with an urgent need which cannot be addressed remotely or postponed, then referral to DUC or a UDCC should be considered.

Any GDP wishing to refer a high risk patient during the week who meets the urgent dental care criteria should telephone DUC on the usual number (028 2566 3512) between 9AM and 5PM (Mon to Fri) where advice will be given on how to have your patient seen at the next available session in DUC or weekend UDCC. Practitioners are reminded not to share this

number with patients. At the weekend the triage hub phone lines will continue to be open from 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM.

The demand/capacity of these weekday sessions as well as the weekend sessions at the established UDC sites will be kept under review and adjustments made if necessary. GDPs on the UDCC rotas will be contacted in the coming days in order to identify practitioners for the Tuesday and Thursday evening slots at DUC. If you have any queries on the above please contact GDS.Correspondence@hscni.net in the first instance.

Lastly, I would like to convey my thanks to those dentists who have worked in UDCCs and to the practices who have offered access to urgent care for unregistered patients over the last 6 months. Your efforts have ensured that during the pandemic those with the most pressing oral health needs have received the care they needed and that this continues to be the case.

Yours sincerely



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Appendix A

4.2 Patient COVID-19 Screening

Patients who are confirmed or possible COVID-19 positive are deemed to be high risk and should not be examined within general dental practice. As such it is suggested that the following questions be asked for all patients prior to booking an appointment and prior to their attendance:

- Have you tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 10 days?
- Have you had any of the following symptoms in the past 10 days?
 - A new persistent cough (coughing for more than an hour or more than three coughing episodes in a 24 hour period)
 - A high temperature or fever
 - Loss of, or altered, sense of smell or taste
- Has anyone in your household or support bubble had any of the same symptoms in the past 14 days?
- Have you been in close contact with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
- Have you been advised to self-isolate as part of the “Test, Trace and Protect” strategy?
- Have you been advised of a close contact by the StopCOVID NI App in the past 14 days?¹
- Have you travelled from a country outside of the Common Travel Area that is not currently on the travel exemption list within the past 14 days?
 - The list of exempt countries is available at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-countries-and-territories-exemptions>

Patients who answer “Yes” to any of the above screening questions are deemed to be high risk and should not attend or enter the practice. If treatment cannot be postponed then referral to an Urgent Dental Care centre should be considered in line with the advice paper “Dental Care in General Dental practice and UDCs during the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Patients should be advised to follow any personal medical advice they receive. A patient is deemed to be “recovered” following their period of self-isolation as long as it has been seven days since the onset of symptoms and they no longer have a high temperature. The cough and altered sense of smell or taste may persist in some patients despite being “recovered” and COVID-19 free. In this case the patient is deemed to be medium risk.

If the patient with a confirmed COVID diagnosis has had at least three consecutive days without fever or respiratory symptoms and has a subsequent negative COVID-19 test the patient is deemed to be low risk.

¹ It is advised that members of the dental team switch off their StopCOVID NI app while in work. Further information is available at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-stopcovid-ni-proximity-app>

Patients who answer “No” to all of the above patient screening questions, have had a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of the dental appointment, and have self-isolated since the test was taken are deemed to be low risk.

Further information in regards to the case definition of COVID-19 is available at <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public> and <https://check.covid-19.hscni.net/>