

March 2024

Your voice on health and care services

Accessing NHS dentists in Oxfordshire

Access to NHS dentists for adults and children for both routine and urgent appointments and treatment continues to be **one of the main issues raised by members of the public** who contact us. We regularly hear from people who have tried contacting several practices across the county without success, and do not know what to do next, as they cannot afford private treatment.

What we have heard:



"I cannot find an NHS dentist since the dentist I was with went private. Over the last couple of years I have pulled every top tooth I had left. I now feel extremely embarrassed when out in public, that I rarely go out anymore and my mental health has been affected."

"Been trying to find an NHS dentist for the past seven years. My partner now has a rotten and broken tooth which needs to be extracted. NHS 111 gives us numbers of practices which will not give us an appointment, urgent or otherwise."

"Dentist deregistered all adult NHS patients and asked us to subscribe to private check up service instead. Cannot get appointments for the kids either. Last appointments were cancelled and not rearranged by surgery. There are no NHS dentists here. We need help but we can't access it. The NHS careline just tells me to keep ringing round and trying but I have tried all leads to no avail and frankly have given up."



Between 25th and 27th March 2024, we carried out a 'mystery shopper' exercise, calling 76 dental practices in Oxfordshire to ask if they were taking on adults or children for NHS dentistry.

19 did not answer with the call either ringing out, going to voicemail or to a callback option.

Of the 57 practices we spoke to, 6 were taking on adult NHS patients and 15 were taking on children (compared to 4 taking on adult NHS patients and 17 taking on children in April 2023).

76 dental practices	Yes - were taking NHS	No - were not taking NHS	No reply
Adults	6 practices	51 practices	19 practices
Children	15 practices	42 practices	19 practices

What dental practices told us:

If the practice was not taking on NHS patients, we asked for advice on what to do. Some suggested trying other specific surgeries or calling around, and others suggested checking the NHS 'find a dentist' search tool. Two mentioned a flexible access scheme in partnership with NHS offered at some practices for certain patients to book an NHS check up and undergo treatment. 13 practice websites had not been updated in 90 days, and 7 gave inaccurate information.

"Had to close our waiting list last year due to high volume."

"At full capacity. Not taking on NHS or private."

"Will only see children on the NHS if the parent is privately registered."



March 2024

Getting dental care

What to do if you need emergency dental treatment

- Call your dentist – some practices offer appointments at short notice.
- If you don't have a dentist, call NHS 111 for advice.

Find out more about emergency and out-of-hours dental care on the www.nhs.uk website.

How to find an NHS dentist

You can attend a dental practice anywhere. To find dental practices near you, put in your postcode into www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist

You can also go to www.dentalchoices.org which is an independent website which gives updates on dental practices which are accepting NHS patients.

You may have to call several dental practices in your area to see if they are accepting NHS patients.

What to do if you can't find a dentist

If after contacting several dental practices in your local area you still can't find a dentist accepting NHS patients, you should call **NHS England's Customer Contact Centre** on **0300 311 2233** or at england.contactus@nhs.net

You can also raise this with the **Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB)** by calling **0800 0526088** or emailing bobicb-ox.palscomplaints@nhs.net

For more information see www.bucksoxonberksw.icb.nhs.uk/your-health/dentists

Oral health advice

- The NHS Live Well website has information on how to look after your teeth and gums and how to keep your teeth clean – see www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums
- The NHS youtube channel also has lots of useful videos if you search for 'oral health' – see www.youtube.com/@TheNHSEngland/videos

Other useful organisations

Oxfordshire Community Dental Service (OCDS) – provide specialised dental care to children and adult patients, who are unable to receive care from a general dental practitioner, but do not necessarily need to be seen in a hospital. You need to be referred to OCDS which caters for a range of people with medical conditions, learning or physical disabilities, anxiety or phobia, mental health issues and those who need special care dentistry, including orthodontics. Its website also has useful advice and leaflets on dental care and oral health – see www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/dental-services-oxfordshire/our-service/resources

Oxfordshire Oral Health Improvement – is commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council to deliver and promote oral health programmes and education services. This includes providing oral health training to health and non-health professionals, including The Healthy Smiles award programme, which supports services working with young and primary school children to adopt tooth-friendly practices. See www.communitydentalservices.co.uk/oral-health-improvement/oxfordshire