

Changes to GP Appointment Booking from 4th September 2023

Frequently Asked Questions

What is changing?

Our waiting times on the telephone are longer than we would like.

We are introducing a new appointment booking system called 'AccuRx'.

To ensure that all patients are able to continue to access care within a suitable timeframe for their needs and with the demand for appointments outstripping our resources, we need to change our internal systems slightly to ensure we prioritise those patients with the most urgent need.

Our waiting times on the telephone are longer than we would like. To ease this situation the more patients we have using the online forms, the freer our telephone lines will be to help those who don't have access to the internet or are not comfortable using it or those who have other needs.

Currently we can generally only offer appointments on the same day for patients with urgent needs, whereas for routine appointments patients may have to wait for several weeks. We want to improve this.

Recently we have been using a system called 'AccuRx Patient Triage' to capture information from the patient for our online medical and administration queries via The Grove Medical Centre website. We currently use a slightly different form of triage (prioritisation of patient care) through our clinical system for patients who contact us on the telephone.

From September we will be using the 'AccuRx Patient Triage' system for ALL patients requesting clinical help regardless of their contact method.

How this will work

If you call us requesting a GP appointment for the same day or for something that cannot wait until our next pre-bookable appointment, the Patient Services Advisor will take you through a short form and record your answers and information, just as they do now. Once the short triage form is complete it will be reviewed by the Duty GP who will assess the information given alongside your medical record. You will then hear either from the GP themselves or from a member of the team with the outcome and/or appointment details. If you need an appointment, you will be offered one either the same day, the following day, within 3 days, within 5 working days or a routine appointment in a few weeks' time dependent upon the severity of your medical condition.

What questions will I be asked?

You will be asked 3 main questions and the information you provide will be passed to the duty GP to review.

- Please describe the medical problem?
- How long have these symptoms/concerns been going on?
- How would you like us to help you?

There are 2 other questions you can answer if you wish:

- Is there anything you are particularly worried about?
- Any times during our opening hours we cannot contact you?

How quickly will you get back to me?

We will respond back to you as soon as we can and in most cases within a few hours within our opening times. For non-urgent or administrative queries we may take a little longer and possibly up to 2 working days. Please be reassured that if you are seriously unwell and need urgent attention then our duty GP will be on hand to respond very quickly.

If you do feel you need to be seen or you need to speak to a GP as you are seriously unwell (but not life threatening) then you should always telephone us. Use the online form for less immediate needs.

What if I need help for an administrative query or just want advice?

Our online form allows you to choose an administration or medical query to:

- request non-urgent GP appointments either on the telephone or face to face.
- Instigate a discussion online regarding a medical query you may have.
- to access reliable and NHS approved self-help information online
- refer yourself to services without the need to go through your GP for help with your weight, stop-smoking and lifestyle changes or mental health talking therapies or physiotherapy.
- Request assistance with a hospital referral or an administrative query
- Request a fit note (sick note) or doctor's letter.
- Request a repeat prescription

The patient services advisor will take you through this form on the phone or you can complete it yourself by clicking the administrative box online.

Why is this change necessary?

To ensure that all patients are able to continue to access care within a suitable timeframe for their need and with the demand for appointments outstripping our resources, we need to change our internal systems slightly to ensure we prioritise those patients with the most urgent need first.

We are currently only able to generally offer appointments on the same day for urgent needs or a routine appointment in several weeks' time. Due to the demand for same day needs, the length of time a patient has to wait to get a routine appointment has had to increase. This means that some patients are waiting longer than we would like.

The new triage system allows GPs to assess each patient's needs and allocate them an appointment or answer their query in a suitable timeframe and allows us to prioritise and ensure those who are most seriously ill are seen soonest.

Our waiting times on the telephone are longer than we would like. The more patients we have using the online forms, the freer our telephone lines will be to help those who don't have access to the internet or are not comfortable using it or those who have other needs.

And to be honest with our patients, due to the continued lack of funds arriving in primary care to provide new resources, larger premises and more GPs and nurses, we are just not able to offer appointments to always suit the desires and wants of the patient, however much we wish to. We have to ensure we are fair to everyone and that it is vital the system we run allows those with serious health needs to be able to access support quickly and it is not a race to the phone at 8am every morning to get the few available slots for the day.

What if I just want to make a routine appointment with a GP or I don't want to discuss my issue with a member of the patient services team?

That's absolutely fine. If you know you want a routine pre-bookable consultation (either a telephone conversation with your GP or a face to face appointment in the surgery), then you can still book these directly online or via telephone. If you don't wish to discuss your issue, then you will be offered a routine appointment.

Please be aware that a routine appointment may be several weeks away. If you feel you need to be seen sooner, then you will need to go through the short triage form either online or on the phone with a member of the patient services team.

What are the advantages of completing the form online?

- By completing the form online, you are reducing the telephone queue allowing those that have urgent needs or can't or don't want to use our online services or those that have other queries to get through to us quicker.
- It means you don't have to speak to anyone or sit in the telephone queue.
- No need to call at 8am to get a same day appointment as the triage forms are reviewed by the Duty GP throughout the day.
- You can complete the form wherever you are either online or using the NHS App at any time during our opening hours.
- You can be assured that all queries go into same system and are reviewed fairly, regardless of your contact method.
- You can use your NHS login and skip a few steps.

What times can I complete the online form?

The triage system is open both online and via our patient services team on the phone during our opening hours of 8am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday. This is to ensure that we treat everyone fairly and no one is 'penalised' for not being able to access the online form.

Is this system new?

Many other GP surgeries across the country use a triage system such as this to help prioritise their patients' needs. These have been successfully in place in some cases for many years and the outcomes have been proven to be of benefit both to the practice and the patients.

Finally:

Due to the continued lack of funds being made available for Primary Care to provide new resources, larger premises, more GPs and nurses, we are just not able to offer appointments to always suit the desires and wants of the patient, however much we wish to do so. We have to ensure we are fair to everyone and it is vital that the system we run allows those with serious health needs to be able to access support quickly and that it is not a race to the telephone at 8am every morning to get the few available slots for the day. The triage forms are reviewed by the Duty GP throughout the day so no need to set you alarm to contact us first thing in the morning.