



**Dental services  
in Redbridge  
May 2021**

## **Disclaimer**

Please note that this report relates to findings from our research conducted between 4<sup>th</sup> May and 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

## **Acknowledgements**

Healthwatch Redbridge (HWR) would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project including Dentist practice staff and managers who answered our questions and HWR volunteers who conducted the brief questionnaires.

## Introduction

Over the last year patients have been telling us that they have been finding it hard to access dentists. We began hearing concerns through our signposting service and via responses to our Covid-19 questionnaire and feedback shared from local community groups via online meetings<sup>1</sup>.

The issue of access to dentists began prior to Covid-19, but the pandemic has exacerbated the concerns and local people have started to raise their concerns with us. This is a nationwide issue, that has reached the media<sup>2</sup> and been raised by local Healthwatch across the country<sup>3</sup>.

After closing at the beginning of the pandemic, dental practices re-opened on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020. However, patients now face a huge backlog and less appointments. Dentists are unable to see patients at their previous rates due to the increased hygiene standards required to ensure treatment rooms are safe.<sup>4</sup>.

## Objectives

- Record up-to-date dental services availability across Redbridge.
- Identify current services on offer to provide a more precise signposting service for local people.
- Provide a baseline of dental service provision in the borough and identify whether it meets current patient needs.
- Use the data when reviewing the quality of dental services through future patient feedback.

## Methodology

Our Healthwatch volunteers rang all dentist practice offering NHS services as part of their contract. Using an NHS online search engine<sup>5</sup> we were able to identify 39 dental practices across Redbridge that offered NHS services.

A telephone questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was created ensuring comparable information was obtained from each practice.

Information was recorded to identify whether practices were offering NHS appointments and if there was a waiting list for such services. Where waiting lists were found, we also asked whether patients were able to book private appointments within the same practice.

If requested, we were also able to email our questions to the practice.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://healthwatchredbridge.co.uk/sites/default/files/healthwatch\\_redbridge\\_covid-19\\_report\\_18.12.20.pdf](http://healthwatchredbridge.co.uk/sites/default/files/healthwatch_redbridge_covid-19_report_18.12.20.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55978595>

<sup>3</sup> <https://bda.org/news-centre/press-releases/Pages/Dentists-back-Healthwatch-call-to-fix-system-in-crisis.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bda.org/advice/Coronavirus/Pages/patients.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Information provided by the NHS Website <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

## Findings

We contacted the 39 NHS dental practices we were able to identify in the borough, receiving responses from 32 of those practices<sup>6</sup>. We received 29 verbal responses and three email responses. The email responses were received following telephone conversations with reception staff. Staff at the other seven practices were contacted by email, however we did not receive a response.

## Practice telephone lines

Volunteers logged most call times to include the length of time it took for the calls to be answered. Call waiting times were generally not too long with most calls being answered in less than one minute. There were only two practices where volunteers were kept on hold for five minutes or more, the longest of these being nine minutes.

Most volunteers were able to get through to a practice on their first attempt. It took our volunteer three or more attempts to get through to four practices. Two of these were called six and eight times respectively before the call was answered.

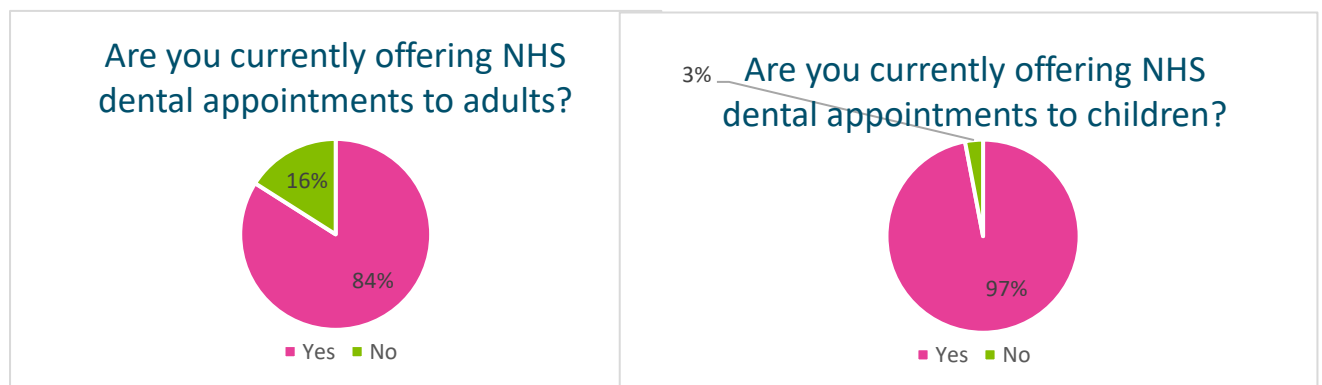
## Dental appointments for adults (and children)

NHS dental appointments are currently being offered for adults at 27/32 (84%) of the 32 practices we received responses from.

Of the five practices that told us they do not have any current appointments available for adults; two are in the IG2 postcode area and three in IG3. Patients still have limited access to practices as the remaining two dentists in IG2 and three in IG3 told us they have available appointments.

*“We are only seeing patients on our list. We may be open in July (for new patients), depending on circumstances.”*

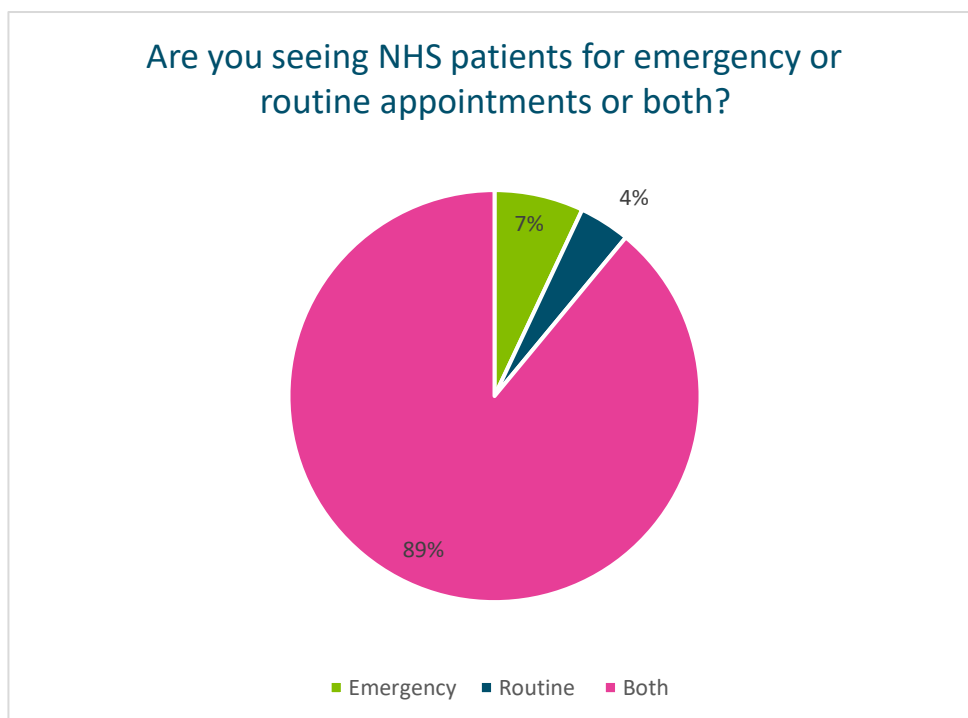
*“We are full at the moment; no appointments are being offered”*



<sup>6</sup> Of the dental practices who did not respond; we spoke to a receptionist at 6 of the 7 practices and followed this up by emailing our questions, however the practices did not complete them. At the 7th practice, we left a total of three telephone messages, but had no response. We were unable to find an email address for this practice and they did not appear to have a website. We found current feedback from patients on the NHS Website, so assume it is currently open.

Children are able to access NHS dental appointments at nearly all practices, with 31 (97%) out of 32 practices telling us they would currently book an appointment for a child.

Of the 27 practices that are currently offering NHS appointments to adults, 24 (89%) are seeing patients for both emergency and routine appointments, two are just seeing emergencies and one told us they are seeing routine appointments<sup>7</sup>.



*“We are practically back to normal, offering routine appointments for our existing patients.”*

*“As we are so busy and booked to capacity, we advise routine appointments to wait until July. We do our best to fit in emergencies.”*

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<sup>7</sup> The practice responded via an email form and ticked the ‘routine’ box when asked if they would see patients.

## Criteria

Practices were asked if they had any specific criteria for accepting patients.

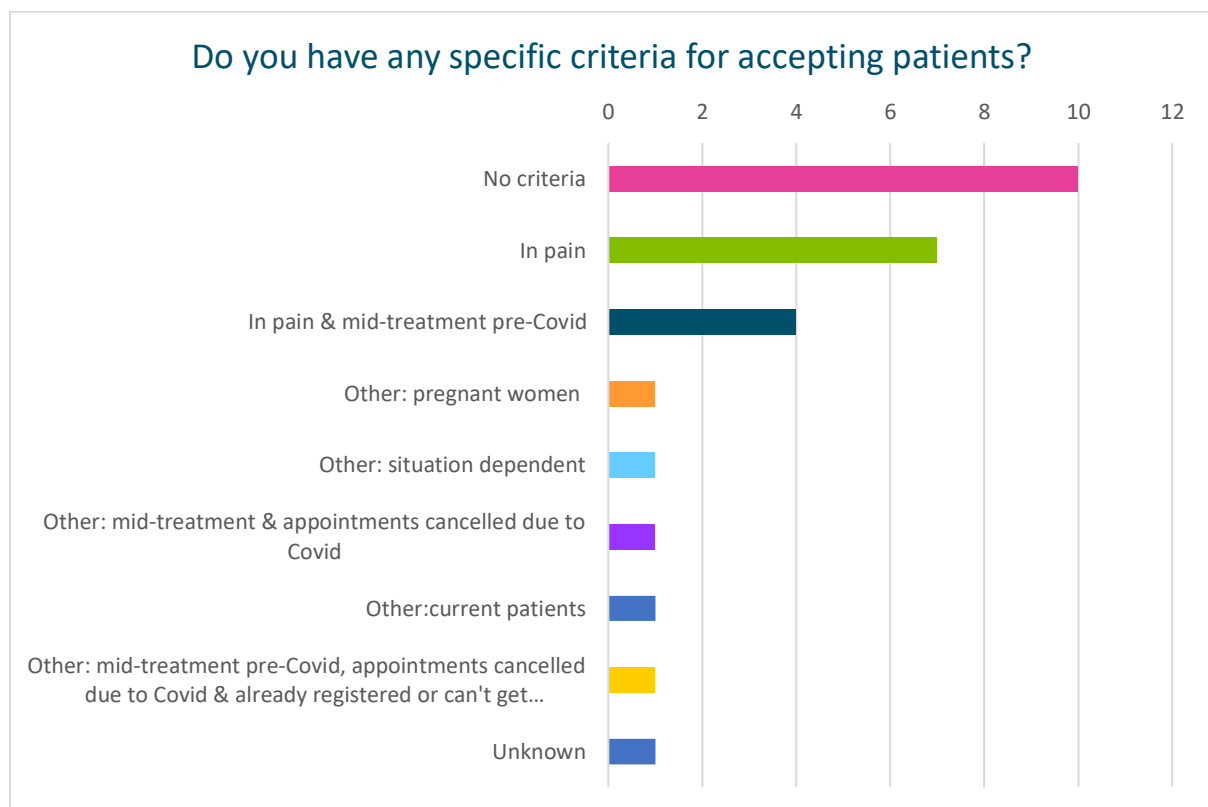
- More than one third, ten practices, told us they did not have any specific criteria for accepting patients.
- Seven practices told us they would accept a patient if they were in pain.
- Three told us they would accept a patient if they were in pain and had their treatment paused due to Covid.

Some practices are only seeing patients with specific criteria:

*“Our NHS provision is for children as well as pregnant women.”*

*“We have appointments for children if it’s an emergency.”*

Six practices told us they are only seeing patients on their list. Three practices told us they are full.



## Waiting list

Only a handful of practices (three for adults and four for children) are operating waiting lists. They have an average waiting time of three months.

*“We have a waiting list for new patients for routine appointments.”*

## NHS and Private appointments

Nearly all, 30 out of the 32 practices told us they see a combination of NHS and private appointments. Although we had not asked for specific information; four practices told us they predominantly see NHS patients.

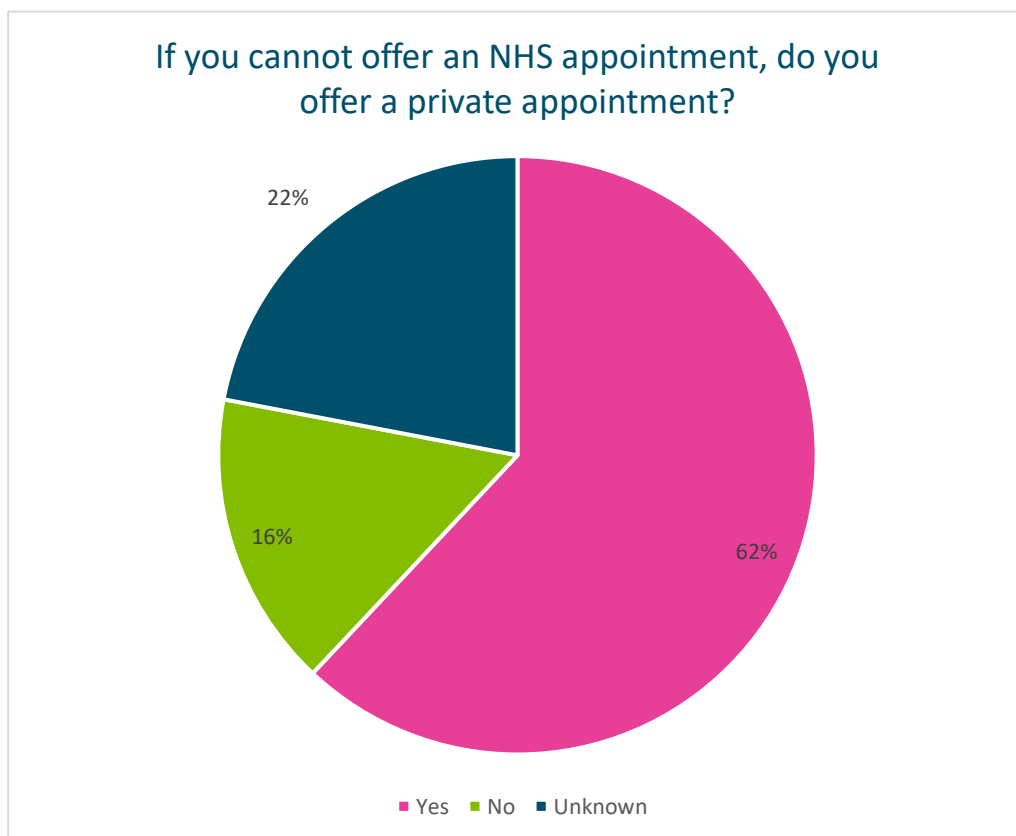
*“99% NHS”*

Five practices told us are mainly for private patients. These five are split across the boroughs in IG2, IG3, IG4 and two in E11.

*“We are predominantly a private practice, with a small NHS contract.”*

Twenty (62%) practices told us they would offer patients a private appointment if they could not offer an NHS appointment.

*“A private appointment is offered if the patient doesn't want to wait”*



## Advice/alternative options

Two thirds of practices, 23 out of 32, would advise patients to ring NHS 111 if they cannot offer them an appointment.

*“Ring 111 if in pain.”*

*“We would ask patients to ring 111 for referral to another practice.”*

Six practices advise patients to ring other dental practices to see if they can offer an appointment (two of these were advising both of these options).

Three practices told patients who want a routine appointment to wait and try again.

One practice was able to tailor the advice it gives to patients by finding out their treatment requirements and then pointing them in the direction of specific practices who can help. They also found out the costs of these (private) treatments and are able to provide patients with an estimated cost.

Another practice told us they would provide patients with an alternative phone number for a practice local to them.

## Summary

Although we had a number of reports from patients that were having problems accessing NHS dentist services; most practices told us they were currently able to offer NHS appointments to adults.

To test this further, we will publish our findings from this report and ask for local people to inform us of where they are still finding problems.

If patients continue to contact us raising issues of access, we will seek to carry out a wider patient survey to identify where problems still exist.



## Appendix 1:

1. Are you currently offering NHS dental appointments to adults? Yes/No

\*\*\*If NO, skip to question 4

2. If yes, are you seeing NHS patients for emergency or routine appointments or both?

Emergency

Routine

Both

3. If you are seeing patients, do you have any specific criteria for accepting them?

If a patient is in pain

If a patient was mid treatment prior to Covid-19

Other, please specify

4. Are you currently offering NHS dental appointments to children? Yes/No

5. \*\*\*Skip this question if the answer to question 1 was YES

If you are not offering NHS dental appointments to adults, do you have a waiting list? Yes/No

6. \*\*\* Skip this question if the answer to question 1 was YES

What is the current waiting time?

Less than 1 month

1-3 months

3-6 months

Over 6 months

7. \*\*\* Skip this question if the answer to question 4 was YES

If you are not offering NHS dental appointments to children, do you have a waiting list? Yes/No

8. \*\*\* Skip this question if the answer to question 4 was YES

What is the current waiting time?

- Less than 1 month
- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- Over 6 months

9. Do you see a mix of NHS and private patients? Yes/No

10. If a patient rings for an NHS appointment, but you cannot offer one, what advice do you give?

11. If you cannot offer patients NHS appointments, do you offer them private appointments?