

Staffordshire NHS Dental Services Explained

September 2025

Do you have an urgent
dental problem or need help
finding an NHS dentist?



Contact
Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent
Dental Advice Line
0300 123 0981

Introduction

Over recent years Healthwatch Staffordshire has received over 300 concerns from the public about access to NHS Dental Services in Staffordshire. We provided feedback to the parliamentary committee looking into dental issues.

We worked with local NHS partners to ensure public feedback is heard and access to services improves.

This report explains improvements to NHS Dental Services access in Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent.

The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Dental Plan

The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB) has developed and approved a Local Dental Plan aimed at addressing long-standing challenges in dental care. These include high levels of tooth decay among children and young people, as well as significantly lower levels of dental access in areas of Stoke-on-Trent with higher deprivation levels. The ICB has collaborated closely with dental providers throughout the development of the plan, listening carefully to their insights to help place NHS dentistry on a more sustainable and resilient footing.



The Local Dental Plan reflects the aims and objectives set out in the national and regional dental recovery plans by improving access for patients, developing and supporting the dental workforce, and reducing oral health inequalities at a local level.

A Dental Services Equity Audit has identified areas across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with the poorest oral health and lowest access to services. This has enabled the ICB to ensure that NHS dental activity is prioritised for these communities. To improve access, the plan will provide an additional 16,190 urgent dental appointments annually.

To support sustainability and workforce recruitment, the ICB has approved an increase in the rate paid to NHS dental practices from April 2025. This seeks to address a longstanding situation in which NHS dental practices in the area have had comparatively low rates nationally. This will also make Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent a more attractive place for dentists to work.

The plan also recognises the need to strengthen the oral health improvement and prevention service, which delivers programmes for children and young people, including supervised toothbrushing and the distribution of toothbrush and toothpaste packs by key workers such as health visitors, and mouthcare training programmes for care home staff so they can support vulnerable older adults.

Finding and registering with an NHS Dentist

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant reduction in access to dental care across the UK with dental practices closed from 25th March to 7th June 2020. Services have still not fully recovered.

Registering for treatment with an NHS dentist differs from registering with a GP in that it doesn't guarantee an ongoing commitment. We have spoken to several people who found after COVID-19 that they were no longer on their dentist's list.

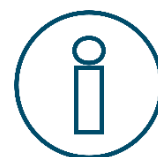


In the 12 months up to 31 March 2024 61% of resident children and 43% of resident adults were seen by NHS Dentists in Staffordshire.

Starting April 2025, NHS dental practices will receive extra resources to accept more patients. Additional funds have been allocated to address specific areas highlighted in the Dental Health Equity Audit.

[Search for an NHS Dentist.](#)

What to expect from your dental appointment



1. Get ready for your appointment

Let your dentist know if you've been experiencing any dental pain or problems with your mouth or teeth. Before your appointment, it's a good idea to write down your symptoms, worries and any questions you want to ask.

2. Tell your dentist if you're feeling anxious

Many people feel nervous about going to the dentist, but if you're anxious, help is available. Talk to your dentist about your fears.

You can also ask a relative or friend to come with you for support.

3. NHS or private care?

Are you being seen as an NHS or private patient? Some high street dental practices provide both types of care. If you need treatment, make sure you understand how much it will cost before committing to it.

There are three standard charges for routine and emergency NHS treatment. Emergency treatment costs the same as the lowest band cost. Your dentist will decide whether you need urgent treatment.

The cost of a private dental appointment will vary between practices.

4. Are you eligible for free NHS treatment?

Some individuals qualify for free or reduced NHS dental care and health cost assistance. This includes children, people who are pregnant or in the first year after childbirth and people on benefits.

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/who-can-get-free-nhs-dental-treatment/>

5. Ask your dentist for a treatment plan

Dental treatments like fillings, removing teeth, and more complex procedures like root canals will have a cost. These usually fall into NHS charges for bands two and three. You should get a personal dental treatment plan if your dentist recommends this treatment.

Your treatment plan will outline your treatments and the associated costs. Your dentist should also discuss any alternative private treatment options and give you the price in writing before you commit to it.

6. Follow the advice your dentist gives you

During your appointment, your dentist should advise you on oral hygiene, telling you how best to care for your teeth to avoid gum disease and tooth decay. They might also suggest you make an appointment with a dental hygienist.

7. Not sure of your treatment plan? Ask again

If you need more information on your dental treatment or aftercare, ask your dentist to review it with you before leaving the room. Your dentist will be happy to discuss your treatment plan with you again and should give you details of who you can contact if you have questions after your appointment.

8. Find out when you're due for a check-up

Your dentist will tell you when they'll need to see you again. Follow-up appointments usually happen between three months to two years later, depending on how healthy your teeth and gums are. However, if you are under 18 years old, it is recommended that you see the dentist at least once a year.

9. Do you have a disability, impairment or sensory loss?

If the NHS partially or fully funds your treatment, your dentist is legally required to ensure you receive information you can easily read or understand to meet your needs.

The dental needs of a person with dementia may become more complicated and they might need specialist treatment, and mental capacity to consent to treatment may need to be assessed. [The Alzheimer's Society has more information here.](#) Information about dental and mouth care for people with dementia can be found [here](#).

10 Unhappy? Find out how to make a complaint

It's always best to speak to your dental practice first to resolve any issues you have about your care. If you're still unhappy about your care, ask for a copy of the complaints procedure from your dentist.

How to get an emergency dental appointment



To access routine or emergency dental care in Staffordshire contact the dental advice line **0300 123 0981** or call **NHS 111**.

Urgent NHS treatment incurs a cost of £27.40 unless exempt from charges.

Urgent treatment can include:

- examination, assessment and advice
- X-rays
- dressing of teeth (a temporary filling)
- emergency partial root canal treatment, for example, pulpectomy or vital pulpotomy
- management of a knocked-out tooth or any necessary treatment needed for an injury
- refixing inlays, crowns and bridges
- removing up to 2 teeth
- aftercare, including treatment for infections
- adjustment and alteration of false teeth (dentures) or orthodontic appliances, such as braces
- urgent treatment for severe conditions that come on suddenly, such as ulcers and herpetic lesions
- treatment of sensitive teeth which affects parts of the tooth called the cementum or dentine
- draining a dental abscess and treating any infection
- 1 urgent filling (routine and non-urgent fillings are a band 2 treatment)

You may need further dental treatment after your urgent appointment, which may have additional costs.

Charges for NHS Dentistry Treatment

(correct as of September 2025)

Most adults need to pay for NHS dental appointments and dental treatment.

Some people can get free NHS dental treatment or help with part of the cost of treatment. You need to discuss this with your dental practice before proceeding.



If you pay for NHS dental treatment, the cost depends on what treatment the dental healthcare professional thinks you need. Dental treatments are grouped into 3 bands, and each band has a different cost. If you need a mix of treatments from different bands, you'll pay for the cost of the highest band of treatment you're having.

Band 1: £27.40

Band 1 can include:

- examination, assessment and advice (a routine dental appointment)
- X-rays, if clinically needed
- putting fluoride on the surface of your teeth
- simple management of gum disease, such as scaling (a thorough clean of your teeth and gums), if clinically needed
- moulds of your teeth, for example to see how your teeth bite together
- minimal adjustments to false teeth (dentures) or orthodontic appliances, such as braces – for example, smoothing rough parts or tightening clasps

If your dental healthcare professional says scaling is clinically needed, you can get it on the NHS.

Scaling is usually included in Band 1 (£27.40), but extensive treatment, or treatment for complex gum problems may be charged as a Band 2 (£75.30) treatment.

If the dentist says scaling is not clinically necessary, you'll have to pay for it privately.

Band 2: £75.30

Band 2 treatment includes all items in Band 1, plus it may include:

- fillings
- [root canal treatment](#) to treat an infection or inflammation in the centre of your tooth
- removing teeth (extraction) and other oral surgery procedures
- sealant to fill small holes or grooves in your teeth
- adding to your false teeth (dentures), such as adding a clasp or a tooth, or making extensive adjustments, such as relining and rebasing
- a bite-raising appliance to correct your bite (does not include a laboratory-made appliance)
- extensive management of [gum disease](#)

White fillings

White fillings are available on the NHS when clinically necessary. For example, if you need a filling in your front teeth.

If the filling is needed in one of your back teeth, a more effective option may be a silver-coloured filling.

Your dentist should explain your options to you. If you'd prefer a white filling, your dentist will be able to advise you about private costs and the risks and benefits.

Root canal treatment

Your dentist should be able to provide root canal treatment, but if you need more complex treatment, they may refer you to another service.

You may be offered the option to get root canal treatment privately as an alternative to getting it on the NHS.

It's your choice whether you have private treatment or are referred to an NHS specialist service, where available.

Wisdom tooth removal

Wisdom teeth can be removed on the NHS when clinically necessary. Your dentist may be able to remove them or may refer you to a specialist service. You can also opt for private wisdom tooth removal.

Band 3: £326.70

Band 3 treatment includes all items in Bands 1 and 2, plus it may include:

- a type of cap that covers your real tooth (crown)
- restoring damaged teeth with inlays and onlays
- false teeth ([dentures](#)) made from plastic or metal
- a fixed replacement for a missing tooth or teeth
- other custom-made appliances, not including sports guards

Crowns and bridges

You may be offered a metal-coloured crown on a back tooth. You could discuss alternative options which may be available privately with your dentist, as well as the risks, benefits and costs. Crowns may need to be replaced in the future.

Orthodontics

Your dentist or orthodontist will decide if you need orthodontic treatment using a standard assessment method. If orthodontic treatment is clinically necessary, you can get it on the NHS. Your dentist or orthodontist will be able to discuss alternative options if your child is not eligible for NHS-funded orthodontic treatment.

Cost of further treatment

If you have dental treatment but need further treatment within 2 months, you do not have to pay extra if the further treatment is included in the same band, or a lower band.

If you need further treatment in a higher band, you'll have to pay the higher band fee.

You'll have to pay for any further treatment after 2 months has passed.

Dental treatments available for free

You do not need to pay if:

- you're having stitches removed
- your dentist must stop bleeding from your mouth – for example, after a tooth extraction
- your false teeth (dentures) need to be repaired – but if they cannot be repaired, you'll have to pay for new ones

Community Dental Services

Midlands Partnership University Trust (MPFT) deliver the [community dental service](#) across Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent.

The service provides:

- An in and out of hours clinically led Dental Advice Line (0300 123 0981). Via clinical triage, this supports access to urgent dental care and signposts other patients to available routine dental care providers.
- In and out of hours urgent dental services.
- Dentistry for children and adults with complex needs such as learning disabilities and mental health problems
- Treatment of anxious adults and children with sedation on referral from high street dentists.
- Extractions for children under general anaesthesia on referral from high street dentists.

Oral Health Improvement and Prevention

This service from Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust provides a range of evidence based [oral health improvement programmes](#) including:



- **Oral Health Training** – building the capacity of the wider frontline workforce to promote oral health within their role.
- **Brilliant Brushers** – a supervised toothbrushing programme for 3- to 5-year-olds
- **Brushing 4 Life** – Targeted provision of toothbrush and toothpaste packs and advice by health and social care professionals.
- **Care to Smile** – a mouthcare programme for training staff working in care homes.

The ICB have committed additional investment into the service to allow the team to expand and increase their capacity.

For further information contact shropcom.healthysmileteam@nhs.net

Common Issues We Have Heard About

1. Tried to make an appointment after Covid to find my dentist no longer had me on their list. People assume that registering with a dental practice is like registering with a GP practice, but it is not.

"I haven't been registered with an NHS Dentist for over 5 years because they took me off the register without my knowledge, and NO dentist inside of a 1hr

drive are accepting new patients. I cannot get dental care without going private which is expensive." December 2023

2. Some people have found that all practices in their area are not taking on NHS patients.

"At an event at Rising Brook Church (Stafford), a gentleman told me about his experience of NHS dentistry and the lack of it and that he now travels to Coventry for treatment as he cannot find anyone locally to provide him with the NHS service." November 2024

3. Signposting advice for urgent NHS Dental Treatment. We have worked with the Clinical Director for Community Dentistry to agree consistent advice to patients to contact the advice line.

"I moved into your area 3 years ago and have not been able to find an NHS Dentist. I have breast cancer and have been put on tablets that can cause dental and bone problems also I am 73 and cannot afford private dentistry. Can you help me?" November 2022

4. Reports from some ladies that they have been unable to access free dental treatment that they are entitled to when on maternity leave.

"I have been on maternity leave and have been unable to find an NHS dentist to provide me with my free dental care during my pregnancy. I had to use a private dentist and pay." 2024

5. Concerns about affordability of treatment. An example where someone was quoted £200 to have a tooth extraction privately-the NHS urgent care service charged them £27.50.

"Would someone please be able to point me in the right direction of how to obtain NHS dental treatment, when no dentists are taking on new patients. Private dental treatment has already cost me around a thousand pounds, and I'm facing another nearly thousand pounds, which I just cannot afford. Any help would be very much appreciated." September 2022

6. There is confusion about NHS Dental charges and what they cover as well as who is entitled to free NHS Dental care.

"My husband and myself are looking for somewhere that takes on NHS patients for treatment as I am in receipt of ESA, Universal credit and PIP.

We are fairly new to the area (Mow Cop) and would need checkups for both of us, I definitely require treatment as all my teeth have become loose and painful. I have had 4 fall out recently.

We have tried contacting several dentists in the area. Those that have responded advise they are not taking on, and a couple have not responded at all." January 2025.

7. Concern from parents about introducing their children to dentists at an early age.

"I want to get my two-year-old registered with an NHS dentist to get them into good habits for looking after their teeth from an early age. Unfortunately, I cannot find a

dentist in Uttoxeter that can take them on at the present time and as I have no access to transport, I cannot take them to places like Lichfield and Leek who I understand have capacity at this time.” 2023

8. Significant issues round health inequalities recently highlighted by the local consultant in Dental Public Health through a health equity audit to which we at Healthwatch contributed.

“During the Family Fun Day event, a man came over to the Healthwatch staff and made us aware of some of the issues facing his child with a learning disability. The dentists didn’t understand the needs of their child, so the father now pays to see a private dentist.” January 2024.

“Patient told us she is a lip reader but the dentist and dental assistant wear masks. She couldn’t understand their attempts to communicate with her, so she asked if the dentist or the assistant could remove their masks, but the dentist refused and at one appointment, the assistant also refused. This led to her leaving mid appointment, before her treatment was finished. When she approached the practice manager, they ‘brushed off’ the dentist’s refusal as him being an ‘old dog’ who would not change. She asked if they could use clear masks or if staff could partake in deaf awareness training, but no comment was made on this by the manager. The manager eventually resolved the patient’s issue by offering her an alternative dentist at the practice.” May 2025

9. Access issues for people living in the rural parts of Staffordshire.

“Person wanted to know which dentists were taking on NHS patients in Biddulph. Advised to call around and ask to be placed on waiting lists. Gave details of a dentist in Lichfield that is taking on new NHS patients. On person’s request gave details of HW Cheshire to see if there are any dentists in Congleton.” May 2023

As well as concerns we also hear positive feedback with examples below.

“I have been a patient at this practice for over a decade now. I have had great service from them over the years and now that they have upgraded the building and taken on more dentists there is little waiting time when you need to see someone outside of a standard check-up. I have had a tooth repaired today and the dentist was so kind when I said I was anxious; they made the experience as painless as possible and demonstrated great skill at preserving my tooth. I am so grateful that I happen to be a patient here when so many are struggling to access NHS dental care locally.” April 2025

“I am fortunate to have an NHS dentist, go for regular check-ups, and am extremely satisfied.” December 2024

Next Steps

The report will now be published on our website for the public to read and we will promote it on our social media and the VCSE Healthy Communities Alliance platform. It will be shared with the Staffordshire and Shropshire Dental Network and the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Integrated Care Board as well as Staffordshire County Council, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the South Staffordshire Alzheimer’s Society and the Children and Families Forum. We also plan to get the report translated into Urdu, Punjabi and Polish languages.



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