

**To: All NI GDPs**

**BY EMAIL**

**2 April 2020**

Dear Colleague

**Important: Out of Hours Arrangements for the Period Friday 3 April to Sunday 5 April Inclusive**

Your ongoing help during the coronavirus pandemic is greatly appreciated.

Work continues on the opening of the Urgent Dental Centres and is at an advanced stage. It is anticipated that the 5 new Centres will be operational in the coming days and further detailed guidance will be issued in due course.

You will understand that the established Out of Hours Dental Clinics (BCH, DUC and CAH) are also designated Acute Sites during this time and, accordingly under recent guidelines, patients will in future no longer be able to attend as they have previously done. **These clinics will cease to be in operation once this Friday (3 April) evening session has finished.**

Practitioners are asked to make interim local arrangements for Out of Hours patients from this point onwards. Please note that this includes local arrangements over the coming weekend (Saturday 4 April – Sunday 5 April). Practices may want to buddy up with a local practice to provide the necessary cover.

**Important - all practices will need to amend their answer phone messages accordingly so that no patients are directed to the previously established Out of Hours dental clinics.**

In practical terms this means that practices need to continue to facilitate telephone triage for patients over the weekend, as has been the case during the week. On Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 April, the 5 new Urgent Dental Centres (UDCs) will begin treating patients, however, their ability to see patients will be very limited in the first instance. For Sat 4, Sun 5, Mon 6, Tues 7 April, dentists wishing to send patients to

the UDCs may do so **having first triaged the patient. The GDP then telephones the UDC Hub ( [REDACTED] ) to speak with a dentist who will confirm the appropriateness of the referral and arrange onward booking into one of the new centres.** Please understand that the ability for these Urgent Care Centres to see patients in the early days is limited and should only be considered when all other options to manage the patient have been exhausted.

**It is essential that practitioners do not give out the above number to patients. If this happens the number will quickly circulate on social media and the Hub will be overwhelmed, leading to potential system failure.**

In order to ensure that dentists are only contacting the hub in relation to appropriate patients, practitioners should refer to Appendix A of my letter of 28 March 2020 which is also appended to this letter. Practitioners may also want to refer to the latest guidance issued a by SDCEP for advice on triaging patients:

<http://www.sdcep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/SDCEP-MADP-COVID-19-guide-300320.pdf>

We are grateful to all the practitioners who have agreed to accommodate unregistered patients at this time. During the weekend triage process we would ask that these arrangements continue i.e. a dentist telephoned by an unregistered patient, who they are unwilling to help themselves, phones a colleague who has put their name on the list to help with unregistered patients. Details of those dentists who have come forward to say they are willing to help unregistered patients were e-mailed to your HSC e-mail account on the 1 April 2020. The most recent details are attached to this e-mail.

We will be making the necessary changes to the relevant health service website to ensure that patients are aware that the Out of Hours centres are no longer operational.

Thank you for your forbearance and cooperation. If you have any queries relating to the above please send them to [gds.correspondence@hscni.net](mailto:gds.correspondence@hscni.net) in the first instance.

Yours sincerely



Michael Donaldson  
Head of Dental Services

## Appendix A

The range of conditions provided for by local UDC systems are likely to include, but are not limited to:

- Life threatening emergencies, e.g. airway restriction or breathing/swallowing difficulties due to facial swelling
- Trauma including facial/oral laceration and/or dentoalveolar injuries, for example avulsion of a permanent tooth
- Oro-facial swelling that is significant and worsening
- Post-extraction bleeding that the patient is not able to control with local measures
- Dental conditions that have resulted in acute and severe systemic illness
- Severe dental and facial pain: that is, pain that cannot be controlled by the patient following self-help advice
- Fractured teeth or tooth with pulpal exposure
- Dental and soft tissue infections without a systemic effect
- Oro-dental conditions that are likely to exacerbate systemic medical conditions