

Patient guidance

Covid-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic

Why routine dental treatments are not available.

Dental check-ups and treatments involve close contact between the dentist and patient and so should not take place. Also, dentists and their teams have to avoid using tools like drills and the ones used for scales and polishes. This is to prevent them from catching the virus from an infected patient and passing it on to other patients.

Drills and other high-speed tools create a lot of 'spray' from patients' mouths so dentists need to use protective clothing and equipment.

COVID-19 has a seven-day period before symptoms show, where someone wouldn't know they had it and could pass it on to others. If an unsuspecting patient had a filling, the spray from doing that procedure would likely infect the dentist and the nurse.

The personal protective equipment (PPE) dentists wear when using high-speed tools is currently required by hospitals treating coronavirus patients. Without this equipment dentists, hygienists, therapists and nurses are not safe to treat patients as normal.

What if I have a dental emergency?

Assuming you have not got COVID-19 related symptoms, you should call your practice. They will be able to decide what your options are.

What counts as a dental emergency?

Urgent dental treatment

- Facial swelling extending to eye or neck.
- Bleeding following an extraction which does not stop after 20 mins solid pressure by biting continuously on rolled up gauze or clean handkerchief (a small amount of oozing is normal, just like if you have grazed your knee).
- Bleeding due to trauma.
- Significant toothache preventing sleep, eating or associated with significant swelling and/or fever that cannot be managed with painkillers.

Straight to A&E

- Facial swelling affecting vision or breathing, preventing mouth opening more than 2 fingers width.
- Trauma causing loss of consciousness, double vision or vomiting.

Non urgent (may need to wait)

- Loose or lost crowns, bridges or veneers.
- Broken, rubbing or loose dentures.
- Bleeding gums.
- Broken, loose or lost fillings.
- Chipped teeth with no pain.
- Loose orthodontic wires.

What you can do to help during this pandemic and managing toothache at home

Painkillers

Anti-inflammatory painkillers (such as ibuprofen) has been shown to be effective against dental pain. Combining paracetamol with ibuprofen has also been shown to be effective. There is currently no strong evidence that drugs such as ibuprofen can make the symptoms of Covid-19 worse, however, if you are showing symptoms of Covid-19 you may wish to avoid taking ibuprofen.

Do NOT take any painkiller if you are allergic to it or your doctor has told you it is not suitable for you.

Take any medication in accordance with the instructions given on the packet. Exceeding the recommended dose could be dangerous.

Toothache

Some toothaches cannot be managed with medication – please contact your dentist by telephone for advice during practice opening hours or telephone NHS 111.

Good cleaning with a fluoride toothpaste and reducing sugar intake to mealtimes only will help stop decay getting any worse.

If there is a hole in the tooth, or a tooth has cracked and is now sharp or sensitive, a temporary filling can be packed into the space – these are widely available from supermarkets, pharmacies and online.

Desensitising toothpastes, such as Sensodyne, can help. Apply the toothpaste several times a day to the sensitive tooth and leave to soak in – do not rinse.

Wisdom teeth

Wisdom tooth pain is usually due to the inflammation of the gum over the erupting tooth, which can be worsened by trauma from biting. Most flare-ups can be managed with good home care and should settle within a week. Excellent cleaning around the area, even if it is painful to brush, will help to encourage healing. A soft diet, the use of a warm saltwater mouthwash as well as painkillers can help to manage any pain.

Ulcers

Although painful, most ulcers will heal within 7 to 10 days. Non-healing ulcers present for more than two weeks should be assessed by a dentist or a doctor.

Warm salty mouthwash is, careful cleaning, soft diet and painkillers are usually enough to manage any discomfort from mouth ulcers.

Ulcers from rubbing dentures may be helped by using denture fixatives to stop the dentures moving excessively, or by removing the dentures where possible.

Bleeding gums

Bleeding from gums is not a dental emergency. Bleeding gums is usually a sign of gum disease and will not stop until brushing and cleaning improves. Brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste for at least two minutes, concentrating especially on the areas that are bleeding. Use floss or interdental brushes to clean between your teeth every day.

Lost crown

If the crown fits back on the tooth easily and if you are confident to do so, you can try replacing the crown with dental cement purchased from a pharmacy, carefully following the instructions given on the packet. Do **NOT** use superglue to try and re-fix your crown.

Please be aware that the practice remains open and if you have any dental problem please ring the normal surgery number and we will do our very best to help you in this difficult time.