

Frequently Asked Questions

What is extended access to general practice?

Extended access to general practice is a CCG commissioned service which provides evening and weekend appointments for patients, 365 days per year including on bank holidays. Through extended access, patients can have an appointment with a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional (dependent on how the service has been commissioned locally) either at their own practice (if their practice is participating in delivery of the service), a practice nearby or a local GP access hub. As a minimum, the extended access service provides appointments on every weekday evening between 6.30pm and 8.00pm and on Saturdays and Sundays to match local need.

How do I book my patients into an extended access appointment?

This will vary dependent on local arrangements. However, in most areas of the country, practices will be able to view the appointment book for the extended access service and book an appointment directly via their clinical system (EMIS, SystemOne, Microtest, Vision etc). Contact your local extended access provider for further details.

Is every practice now expected to offer evening and weekend appointments?

No. This is not about every practice being open seven days a week but instead practices or other GP providers working together at scale to provide patients with access to evening and weekend appointments across a wider population. Some practices may also wish to continue offering evening or weekend sessions to their own patients under the extended hours DES but this is largely for a practice's own registered patients and separate to the CCG commissioned extended access service.

Why should I signpost patients to evening and weekend appointments provided by another practice?

Extended access is a CCG commissioned service for all local patients to help improve choice and convenience particularly for those patients who might otherwise find it difficult to access an appointment during core hours, and those who are working. In addition, patients may be able to have their needs met more quickly through access to an appointment with a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional in the evening or at the weekend, rather than waiting for an appointment at their own practice.

Should I be advertising the availability of evening and weekend appointments in my own practice?

Yes. The services are there to offer more choice and convenience for patients and also reduce the pressure on hardworking clinicians and staff working in general practice. It is important that patients know about the services that are available to them in the local area. Extended access providers will have advertising materials that can be displayed in your practice, e.g. posters or flyers which you should make available to your patients. In addition, we would expect all practices to place information about their local extended access service on the practice website so that patients can find out more. If you would like to download any additional materials for use in your practice, please visit www.england.nhs.uk/gp/gpfpv/redesign/improving-access/communications-guide.

What if my patients prefer to see their own GP at my practice?

Extended access to general practice is about offering patients timely and convenient access to an appointment however we recognise that not all patients will wish to be seen at another practice and may prefer to wait to see their own GP. The key thing is to ensure that patients are given the choice and are aware of the range of services that are available to them.

Will the GP or clinician in the extended access service be able to view my patients' records?

Yes, data sharing agreements have been put in place between practices to ensure clinicians delivering extended access services will have access to a patient's record at the time of the appointment, if the patient has given permission. The level of access to records varies across the country, dependent on the local agreement. In some areas, where multiple systems are in use e.g. EMIS, SystemOne, Vision., the clinician may only have access to view the record and will need to ask a receptionist from the patient's registered practice to upload any notes from this appointment. In other areas, where all practices use the same IT system, clinicians may have full read and write access to a patient's record, meaning they can both view the patient's history and add notes from the appointment.

Will my patients still be able to get a prescription, referral to other services or have tests done if their initial appointment takes place in extended access?

Yes. Patients seeing a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional through the extended access service should be able to access the same services they would during normal working hours at their own practice.

What is a 'hub'?

Practices working together to provide extended access services may offer appointments at a local GP access 'hub'. A hub is a premise where NHS services

are delivered from and could be a host practice that provides pre-bookable and same day evening and weekend appointments to patients across a local population, or even an Urgent Treatment Centre where a GP and other clinicians are available. Hubs should meet patient needs and be easily accessible, e.g. they are generally established in the centre of a local area or on a bus route.

Can patients contact the hub directly?

This will be dependent on local arrangements. In most areas of the country, patients are required to contact their own practice initially, who can then signpost them to an appointment within the extended access hub. It is therefore important that general practice receptionist teams are aware of extended access services and understand how to book patients into appointments so that they can provide the right advice and information to patients. Increasingly hubs are establishing a direct telephone number which allows patients to contact them and book appointments. In other areas NHS111 services will direct patients to extended access appointments.