



Civic Medical Centre

Bebington

About our new appointment system (launching 1st October 2025)

In our previous letter we advised patients that we are launching a new total triage appointments system. This will help us to manage demand for appointments and ensure that patients are directed to the most appropriate healthcare profession when contacting the surgery.

We can now confirm these changes take effect from Wednesday 1st October 2025.

How the new system work?

All new requests for GP and Advanced Nurse Practitioner appointments and/or advice will need to be submitted via our online consultation tool (PATCHS). This can be accessed via the surgery website or via the NHS App (08:00-18:30 weekdays, except for bank holidays and other times when the surgery is closed).

Within this new system, all PATCHS requests will be reviewed by a clinician, who will then take appropriate action - this could be arranging an appointment with a specific clinician at the surgery, issuing medication, requesting some investigations, making a referral, or directing the patient to appropriate local services.

The reply may come by telephone or email or via the NHS App (with a follow up failsafe email/text message) so please do download the NHS App and check it after submitting a PATCHS request.

Patients will receive a reply to a routine PATCHS within two working days. However we acknowledge that some PATCHS will need to be dealt with more promptly - therefore if you feel that you have an issue that needs a same-day response please submit it as early in the morning as possible to enable us to triage it that day.

What if I can't submit an online PATCHS?

While we would encourage *everyone* to complete a PATCHS form for *all* problems (including home visits), those unable to complete the form via the website or NHS app will still be able to contact the surgery by telephone or in-person – this just means that one of our care navigators will complete the PATCHS request for you. This will then be added to the triage list to be reviewed by the clinician alongside the requests received online.

Contrary to some of the questions and comments we have received since our last letter, this new system does NOT mean we are going to stop seeing patients at the surgery. It means that we will try to make better use of our appointments, and those of other local services, to reduce duplication, prioritise the most at-risk patients, provide timely care, improve continuity of care, and reduce waiting times for our appointments.

What are the benefits of the new system?

The benefits we hope to see from this system include:

- Ensuring patients receive the right care or are signposted to appropriate services as quickly as possible.
- Making sure urgent issues will be prioritised appropriately.
- Making the surgery more efficient as many problems or enquires can be dealt with over the phone, via text message, or online without the need for a face-to-face appointment.
- Clinicians will be able to quickly identify potentially serious or urgent concerns and maximise patient safety.
- Fewer unnecessary appointments.
- Being able to make patients aware that some services such as Musculoskeletal Medicine (Physiotherapy, Orthopaedics and Rheumatology), Talking Therapies and Antenatal Care allow patients to self-refer without the need for an appointment at the surgery first.
- The promotion of other healthcare services in the local area. For example pharmacies can treat a wide range of minor ailments without an appointment. Patients who utilise these healthcare services can help reduce the demand and therefore waiting times for GP appointments.
- Shorter waiting times for routine appointments.

Why are we making these changes?

These changes are in response to the government's Plan for Change which aims to help end the scramble for appointments first thing in the morning by having PATCHES open throughout the working day (weekdays 08:00 -18:30, excluding bank holidays).

We will review this system at regular intervals to ensure we are providing the best possible service.

How can patients make the best use of total triage?

If you haven't already, please download the NHS app where you can submit PATCHS consultations and receive replies.

Please complete *one* patches consultation for *one* medical problem when you need to consult the surgery.

Please answer all the questions you are prompted to answer. We appreciate this can be frustrating, but it does provide valuable information for the triaging clinician to help ensure we provide the right care. If this step is bypassed and more information is required, we may need to ask for this before we can triage the request.

PATCHS consultations are automatically saved to your medical record so please select the "*someone I care for*" tab if you are completing it on behalf of someone else rather than doing it in your own name, to ensure it is automatically uploaded to the correct record.

PATCHS will be open throughout our working hours (weekdays 08:00-18:30, excluding bank holidays) – please be aware though that we do still have a finite number of appointments each day and therefore would encourage patients to submit their requests as early as possible.

This is particularly important for more acute or urgent problems that may require a same-day review.

When submitting a PATCHS consultation please make it clear if there are days or times you are unable to attend the surgery or receive a phone call. We will endeavour to accommodate this as best we can, but a patient might be directed to NHS 111 / Out of Hours if they need help when the surgery is closed.

What about home visits?

As a practice we distribute our home visits between clinicians and conduct them between our morning and afternoon surgeries. We therefore request that all home visit requests, if possible, are submitted before 11:30 to ensure they can be triaged and undertaken in this time period.

You mentioned pharmacy services?

PATCHS may direct you to the Pharmacy First Service if this is appropriate. This service will provide prompt treatment for several minor ailments without the need for a GP appointment and is designed to ease pressure on GP Surgeries so they can focus on more complex medical conditions and continuity of care. If you are directed to the Pharmacy First Service, please do follow this advice. The Pharmacy First Service will treat the following conditions at your local pharmacy:

- Earache (patients aged 1-17 years)
- Impetigo (patients aged 1 year and over)
- Infected insect bites (patients aged 1 year and over)
- Shingles (patients aged 18 years and over)
- Sinusitis (patients aged 12 years and over)
- Sore throat (patients aged 5 years and over)
- Uncomplicated urinary tract infections (women aged 16-64 years)

What about dental services?

GPs are neither trained nor indemnified to provide dental care so please do not complete a PATCHS request for dental problems and instead consult a dentist or phone NHS 111 for emergency dental care.

Can't I just email you instead of submitting a PATCHS?

Please do not use the practice prescription or gatekeeper email address to request appointments or raise clinical problems. These requests should be done through PATCHS, and we will direct patients using the practice email to request appointments or raise clinical problems to complete a PATCHS consultation instead.

What if I'm not happy with how my problem has been triaged?

If, for any reason, you are unhappy with the outcome of the triaging clinician's response to a PATCHS consultation then please complete another one, but with more information about your condition to aid the triaging clinician.

Do I need to submit a PATCHS for every type of appointment?

You will not need to complete a PATCHS consultation for routine reviews such as medication reviews, HRT reviews, Anticoagulation, Asthma and Diabetes reviews. Our Nurses and Pharmacist will continue to invite patients to book an appointment for these when they are due.

Patients who have been asked to arrange a follow-up with a GP or Nurse Clinician will be offered appointments at the time (rather than having to submit a new PATCHS), or be able to arrange a follow-up appointment by the phoning the surgery. This will be recorded by the requesting clinician. If we have invited a patient for an appointment with a GP (for example chronic disease related), there will also be a record of this on the system.

Getting it Right

As a practice we appreciate that changes like this may concern some people, and online consulting or using services such as Pharmacy First may seem unfamiliar and less personal than seeing a doctor face to face.

If you feel this way, we would ask you to work with us as we implement this system rather than to push back against it, as our aim and hope is that it will reduce the early morning scramble for appointments, and reduce waiting times for routine and follow-up appointments.

We will continually review the new system (including asking for feedback from patients) and seek to make improvements/changes as appropriate.

We'd like thank our patients for their patience and support during this transition phase. We are happy to help any patients who'd like support using the online services.