

Accessing dental services under COVID-19:
Reviewing Brighton and Hove dental practice
websites and out of hours telephone messages.



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Introduction

"We urge the Government to take urgent action to address issues with access to NHS dental care as we continue to hear from people about their poor experiences."

[Healthwatch England]

On the 9th February, Healthwatch England announced a dental crisis as a result of local Healthwatch, including Brighton and Hove, sharing concerns from local people trying to access dental services during the pandemic.¹

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Healthwatch Brighton and Hove had begun speaking to people about a range of services, including dental. However, unlike other medical services, people told us that it was access to dental care where the problems mostly lay. We had already heard from local people contacting our information line that:

- Dental providers were giving mixed messages as to whether they were open or not;
- NHS patients were receiving a raw deal, as dentists were only accepting new private patients, and existing NHS patients were only offered private care as the accessible alternative; and
- People were being asked to pay extra costs applied due to PPE and other COVID-19 infection controls but this was not made clear when booking an appointment.

At the same time, we ran an online survey and from the 56 people who responded, we were told:

- 60% found it difficult or very difficult to find an NHS dental service to help them;
- 25% never heard back from the dental service they contacted; More than three days elapsed before 38% heard back about an initial consultation; and
- 59% were dissatisfied with waiting times to see someone.

To read the full findings from this 2020 survey, please visit our website here: <https://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/report/2021-01-12/dental-services-during-covid-19>.

During 2020, Healthwatch Brighton and Hove raised these issues with NHS England who commission dental services, local MPs asking for our concerns to be tabled to the Secretary of State for Health, and local NHS leaders. We also provided findings to the Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (9th December 2020),

¹ To read Healthwatch England's report, please see:

<https://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/news/2020-12-15/dentistry-impact-covid>

asking NHS commissioners to improve access to dental services and clarify important issues for the public.

In 2020 and 2021, we provided people with a regular COVID-19 bulletin that included up-to-date advice on how to access dental services during the pandemic. This included a special report about dental services (12th February 2021)² and specific information on accessing services under the current lockdown (19th February 2021)³.

Having heard about the difficulties in accessing dental services, the next obvious step for us was to look at the information being provided to people. It would be difficult for us to make anonymous calls to practices during opening hours, without eliciting questions about the caller's personal details. Therefore, in January this year, we looked at the COVID-19 related advice given to people on all 43 Brighton and Hove NHS dental practice websites⁴ and on the telephone messages heard when calling the same dental practices out of normal hours. We also looked at the website and out of hours message associated with the Brighton & Hove Emergency Dental service.

This report is about the COVID-19 related information we found during this review.

Methodology

Healthwatch staff and volunteers reviewed all 43 Brighton and Hove NHS dental practice websites and made phone calls to the same dental practices out of normal hours (before 8am or after 6pm). The reviews and phone calls were made concurrently over a two-week period between 2nd - 14th February 2021.⁵

Each volunteer reviewing **dental practice websites** was asked to answer the same core set of questions when reviewing the COVID-19 related information and advice offered to patients. If the dental practice did not have a website or if the website had no information about accessing services during COVID-19, the review ended.

² To read the special report on dental services, please see: <https://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/sites/healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/files/Healthwatch%20Brighton%20and%20Hove%20COVID%2C%20health%20and%20social%20care%20update%2012.2.21.pdf>

³ To read the information on accessing dental services during the lockdown in January 2021, please see: <https://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/news/2021-02-11/coronavirus-covid-19-information-about-seeing-dentist>

⁴ NHS England provided us with the information on the 43 dental practices in Brighton and Hove.

⁵ Phone calls were carried out between 2nd - 14th February 2021; Web reviews were made between 2nd - 6th February 2021.

Questions covered the following areas of advice:

- Type of appointment available (routine and/or urgent, prioritisation);
- Visiting the practice;
- New patients;
- Emergency signposting;
- Quality check (how up-to-date is the message); and
- Volunteer feedback

We also looked at the website associated with the Brighton & Hove Emergency Dental service, analysis of which is included in the website review.

Volunteers conducting **phone calls to dental practices out of hours** were asked another set of core questions about the COVID-19 related information provided in the message left for patients. These questions were similar to those that were asked when reviewing websites, but necessarily less in number. If the dental practice did not have any telephone message, the review ended. These questions covered the following areas:

- Services available;
- New patients;
- COVID-19 procedures; and
- Emergency signposting.

We also looked at the out of hours message associated with the Brighton & Hove Emergency Dental service, analysis of which is shown separately.

Volunteer responses were recorded on an online platform (SurveyMonkey) and downloaded into Excel for analysis. Website review questions were analysed separately from out of hours questions and within each of these sets, questions were analysed individually.

Also included in the report is a comparative findings section. We compare the COVID-19 information provided on websites with the information given in the OOH message across practices, to demonstrate if some dental practices generally provided better information than others. We compare three sets of information, namely:

- Availability of information;
- Availability of service-specific information; and
- Availability of advice on emergency services and COVID-19 related information.

Findings - Website review

We looked at all 43 Brighton & Hove NHS dental practice websites for information on services available under COVID-19. We found:

- **Four practices do not have a website.** These are represented on the NHS Brighton dental care website⁶ which gives the address and telephone number of the practice but doesn't provide any information about what services are provided by the practice (either under COVID-19 or otherwise).
- **12 practices do not provide any information to patients regarding services under COVID-19.** We asked volunteers to look for a written patient notice regarding COVID-19, either displayed on the front page; under a COVID-19 section/sub-heading or other easily definable section; or somewhere else on the website.
- **We also looked at the Brighton & Hove NHS Emergency Dental Service website.** We found that while patients are provided with numbers to call in an urgent or out of hours situation, there is no mention of COVID-19 specifically or how dental services are affected as a result of the pandemic.
- **Four practices are not open during lockdown.** We asked volunteers if the information provided to patients on the website indicated if the dental practice is open at the moment (during January 2021 lockdown). Of those that had websites and provided information on services under COVID-19, only 23 practices advised they were open.

Once we had eliminated practices without a website, those without any information on services under COVID-19 (including the Emergency Dental Service) and those who advised they were closed during this period, **we were left with only 23 out of the 43 Brighton and Hove NHS dental practice websites to review.**

Therefore these 23 practice websites became the focus of the following questions.

⁶ <https://www.nhs.uk/services/dentist/brighton-dental-care>

F1: Type of appointment available (routine and/or urgent, prioritisation)

Our first questions looked at what services were being offered under COVID-19 and we found:

- **Eight practice websites do not clearly advise patients as to what type of appointment/care is being offered.**
- 13 practice websites advise that the practice is offering both routine appointments (check-ups) as well as urgent and essential care.
- Two practices advise patients that only urgent and essential care is offered.

NHS England set out COVID-19 *guidelines* for prioritising patients based on urgent need and for appointments that had been previously delayed due to the pandemic.⁷

We therefore looked for this information during our website review. However, we found that:

- **16 practice websites do not mention anything about prioritising either appointments or patients.**
- Five practices state that urgent dental appointments are being prioritised.
- Two practices advise that priority is given to urgent dental appointments as well as patients who experienced an appointment that was previously cancelled due to the pandemic.

“This is part of the Sussex dental group advising that practice are in phase 2 which means they are seeing patients whose treatment was interrupted in 2020. Phase 1 is urgent appointments which I presume are still happening.” (Volunteer)

“There is one line only that reads ‘Notice: Hours or services may differ due to COVID-19.’ There is no other information either there or on the website as to what services are offered under COVID-19.” (Volunteer)

“This is part of the Sussex Dental group covering a number of practices. Information talks about ‘phases’ which are not clear e.g. latest news says ‘now moving to phase 3’ but difficult to know what that means.” (Volunteer)

⁷ Need to find a reference - possible something in: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/06/C0581-covid-19-urgent-dental-care-sop-update-16-june-20-.pdf>

F2: Visiting the practice

The second set of questions focused on what patients were advised regarding visiting the dental practice during COVID-19.

We found that:

- **16 practice websites advised patients to call before visiting the practice,** in line with British Dental Association advice.⁸
 - However, **eight of these 16 practices did not provide an explanation** to the patient on the reasons for this (i.e. due to COVID-19 infection controls, social distancing etc)
- **Seven practice websites did not advise patients to call first.**
- Only 10 practice websites included a separate statement about attending the practice **ONLY** if the patient has an appointment; 13 practice websites did not include this information.

We also looked for information advising patients as to the COVID-19 infection control procedures in place for patients visiting the practice.

While we found that the majority of practice websites (20) did provide this information, three practices did not.

In addition, most practice websites (21) did not mention any additional charges or increased costs for patients attending appointments due to the use of PPE or other factors.

However, two websites did advise patients there could be additional charges in relation to COVID-19 factors. Neither of these websites provided patients with any specific costs for these.

“Extensive info on Covid 19 precautions and changes on front page and on another page linked to front page.” (Volunteer)

“Clear advice and video of what to expect.” (Volunteer)

“COVID-19 infection control procedures mentioned but not specified apart from mentioning changes to reception service.” (Volunteer)

⁸ See the BDA website for further details: <https://bda.org/advice/Coronavirus/Pages/patients.aspx>

F3: New patients

We reviewed the COVID-19 information for advice to new patients.

We found that:

- **Almost one half of the websites (10) did not provide any information for new patients.**
- **13 practice websites offered availability to new patients and of these:**
 - Three practices had availability for both NHS and private patients;
 - Five practices only offered availability to private patients; and
 - Another five practices did not make it clear as to which type of patients they were able to offer availability to.

In addition, only one website provided advice about exemption from paying for NHS treatment e.g. due to low income.

“It mentions NHS and private treatment but in the FAQs in answer to new patients, it mentions ‘our practices are open to new private patients’. It is not clear but perhaps they offer NHS for existing customers only? Part of the BUPA group so all COVID information is directed through the group BUPA site.” (Volunteer)

“No mention at all of NHS so maybe a wholly private practice.” (Volunteer)

“Practice provides NHS service for children (<18) only and private services for adults.” (Volunteer)

F4: Emergency Signposting

We reviewed the COVID-19 information for any signposting to services. Where did the information signpost patients to, for advice or in the case of any emergency?

The majority of dental websites (19) advised patients to call the dental practice (during opening hours) for advice. One practice referred patients to call NHS 111 for advice on dental services. Three practice websites also offered advice on self-care.⁹

Only four websites provided information on where to go in the case of an NHS emergency:

- **None of the practices** referred patients to the NHS Dental helpline 0300 123 1663 in the case of an emergency or not being able to get through to the local dentist
- Only **three of the practices** referred patients to the Emergency Dental Service Brighton & Hove 03000 24 25 48 in the case of an emergency during the evening or at the weekend.
- **Four websites provided other advice** but only two of these websites, provided mobile numbers that you could call out of hours, and one of these numbers was only for private patients - NHS patients were advised to call a Lewes-based number that only worked during normal opening hours.

Patients advised to call another number in the case of an emergency:

“Patients should visit A&E if they have jaw swelling that is causing difficulty in breathing or swallowing, uncontrolled bleeding or facial trauma.” (Practice Website A)

“For an emergency out of hours please call your local practice to find the telephone number you will need for your area.” (Practice Website B)

“Very clear patient pathway before, during and after, appointment but no info on new patients, or mention of phoning before and not arriving unless you have an appointment or any mention of emergency numbers.” (Volunteer)

⁹ For further information on self-care, see the NHS pdf at referred to on the Healthwatch Brighton and Hove website here: <https://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/news/2021-02-19/coronavirus-covid-19-information-about-seeing-dentist>

F5: Quality check (how up-to-date is the message)

We next looked at whether the COVID-19 information was up-to-date.

Seven practices did not provide either a date when the information was last updated or reference to their guidelines being updated regularly in line with government guidance.

Of those that did provide one or both of these pieces of information, we found:

Date updated

- 60% of the practice websites (14) gave the date the information was last updated: nine of these were dated January 2021 and therefore were up-to-date.
- However, **five websites provided a date that indicated they had not updated their COVID-19 information since 2020:**
 - two practices were eight months out of date;
 - one practice seven months and another practice six months out of date respectively; and
 - The fifth practice was last updated in November 2020.
- **Nine surgeries did not provide a date the information was last updated.**

Government Guidelines

In addition, **four websites made a reference to their COVID-19 information being updated regularly in line with government guidance.** However, while two of these websites had also provided a date the information was last updated, two of these did not and so it was not possible to show how up to date they were with government guidance.

19 surgeries did not refer to updating in line with government guidance.

“The information reads as if it was written at the beginning of the pandemic (during the first lockdown) and does not read as if it has been updated since then, despite them saying so. They talk of ‘additional costs to the practice but at this time these will not be passed onto the patient. However, they could be if the costs continue to rise and are prolonged.’” (Volunteer)

F6: Volunteer feedback

Finally, we asked the volunteers for their own feedback on the information provided to patients about services available under COVID-19.

This is what our volunteers fed back to us:

- 18 websites were balanced between positive and negative instructions e.g. do not visit vs. please call first;
- 12 websites were courteous and showing empathy e.g. stay safe, we understand the situation is frustrating etc.;
- 19 were clear overall for example, advice is clearly laid out and understandable; and
- Two websites were none of the above.

We also asked for anything else that was included in the message that the volunteers would like to mention. We received a variety of comments. Several related to where the lack of information about NHS services implied the surgery was exclusively seeing private patients.

“Clear message, courteous but not really empathetic, more informative.” (Volunteer)

“The message is very short (not much detail) and flashes onto the home page over the top of the normal web page.” (Volunteer)

“On first accessing the website a Covid 19 notice appears. If you click anywhere else on the site you cannot go back to the notice.” (Volunteer)

Findings - Out of hours telephone message review

We called all 43 Brighton and Hove NHS dental practice out of hours telephone numbers to find that three of the practices did not have any patient message.

Therefore, the 40 practices with out of hours messages, became the focus of the review. We also called the Brighton & Hove NHS Emergency Dental service and our review of their message is shown separately.

In addition, two of the practices had very muffled messages making it hard to hear and our volunteers had to listen to the information several times before understanding the advice given.

“Message rapid and unclear. Had to call it 3 times to get numbers - which were not repeated.” (Volunteer)

“Message not clear, muffled and too fast.” (Volunteer)

F7: Services available

The first set of questions focus on what services the out of hours message advises patients is being offered by the practice. We found:

- **Only five practices were explicit in their message, about offering routine appointments.**
- Two practices advised that routine appointments were not available and the remaining 33 practice messages did not specify one way or the other.
- In addition, three practices were explicit about offering hygienist appointments. Two advised that hygienist appointments were not offered and the remaining 35 were not specific about this service.
- **Only seven practices were explicit in their message about offering urgent appointments.**
- Two practices advised that urgent appointments were not available and the remaining 31 did not specify one way or the other.

“Very brief message: ‘If emergency or other concerns, please leave a message. During out of hours, ring 03000 242 548 or 111.’” (Volunteer)

“Very short message, just opening hours and Emergency Dental Service number and asking caller to leave message.” (Volunteer)

“No opportunity to leave a message.” (Volunteer)

F8: New patients

Next, we listened to the out of hours message, for any reference about availability for new patients.

We found:

- **Only one practice was explicit in their message, about being open for new patients**, though they did not specify whether this was for NHS and/or only private patients.
- Two practices advised they were not available for new patients and one practice advised they were not available for *NHS* patients. The remaining 36 messages did not specify one way or the other.

“Stated in message that the practice was not accepting new NHS patients. Otherwise message states opening hours and gives 03000 242 548 number.” (Volunteer)

“Very short message - “if you have an appointment, please be assured we are carrying out all treatments”. Says nothing about emergencies out of hours, or anything about new patients..”
(Volunteer)

Some of the messages we listened to, indicated a disparity between NHS and private patients:

“No charge for Denplan patients. Everyone else £155 call out fee. Does not say what this covers.” (Volunteer)

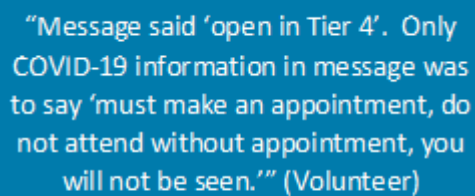
“Caller asked to press 1 if NHS patient and out of hours emergency, so as to be put through to the Emergency Dental Service number. Or press 2 if a private patient.”
(Volunteer)

F9: COVID-19 procedures

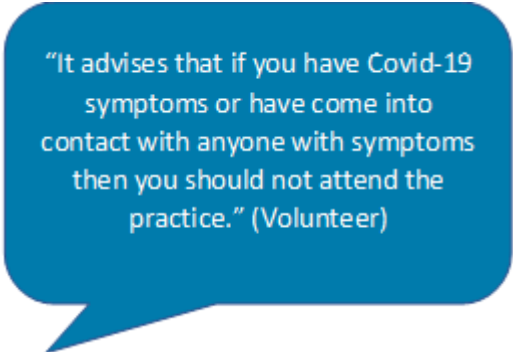
Only three messages provided any information or guidance about COVID-19 infection control procedures for patients visiting the practice.

Most practices (39) were not specific about whether any additional charges or increased costs would apply to patients attending appointments due to the use of PPE or other COVID-19 related factors?

The only practice that did mention specific costs was related to their own emergency (mobile) number, where the cost of £165 would be charged if a call to their emergency number resulted in a call-out.



"Message said 'open in Tier 4'. Only COVID-19 information in message was to say 'must make an appointment, do not attend without appointment, you will not be seen.'" (Volunteer)



"It advises that if you have Covid-19 symptoms or have come into contact with anyone with symptoms then you should not attend the practice." (Volunteer)

F10: Emergency signposting

These questions related to which service the phone message advised patients to contact for dental advice and treatment.

We found:

- **21 practices advised patients to call the same practice during business hours.** 15 practices did not provide this advice and four practices were unclear in their advice as to whether to phone the practice during business hours.
- **28 practices advised patients to call the Emergency Dental Service Brighton & Hove (03000 24 25 48) in the case of an emergency during the evening or the weekend.** 11 practices did not provide this advice and one practice was unclear in their advice about this service.
- **Only two practices advised patients to call the NHS Dental Helpline (0300 123 1663) in the case of emergency or not being able to get through to the local dentist;** 32 practices did not provide this advice and one practice was not clear in their advice about this service.
- In total, **over one quarter of practices (11) did not provide people with advice on what to do in the case of an emergency.** One of these practices provided a local number as an alternative to calling the practice, but as this could not be contacted out of hours, this was considered to be one of the 11 not providing an *emergency* number.

“This number has a person-operated messaging service but all they were doing was taking a message for the dentist to call me back the next day. They could not give me any information about ‘how the practice is operating under COVID.’” (Volunteer)

“They ask caller to leave a message so that someone from practice may get back to them during working hours. But there is no information on who to call now.” (Volunteer)

“Phone cannot take messages, instead asks for messages to be emailed to info@brightonemergencydentist.co.uk

F11: Emergency Services out of hours message

In addition to the 40 dental practice phone numbers, we also called the Brighton & Hove NHS Emergency Dental service, 03000 24 25 48.

We found that:

- There are two numbers operating over different hours. One opens 9am - 5pm. The other out of hours telephone number, opens at 5.30pm-10.30pm.
- The daytime message only offered advice and no face-to-face appointments.
- The out of hours message referred to the daytime number or to go to A&E.
- The message did not provide the details for the NHS Dental Helpline ((0300 123 1663) as an alternative to the service they offered.
- There were no references to additional charges or increased costs for patients attending appointments due to the use of PPE or other factors.
- We also noticed that the hours advised in the phone message, differ from those advertised on the website (9am - 5.30pm).

Emergency Services Out of hours Message

Caller is "referred to daytime number and to go to A & E if uncontrollable pain, bleeding or major trauma due to an accident."

(Volunteer)

Emergency Services Daytime Message

"The waiting message said they only offer advice and no face-to-face, due to COVID."

(Volunteer)

Comparative Findings

Comparing individual practice websites with their corresponding Out of hours phone messages (OOH messages)

In this section we compare the information provided on websites with the information given in the OOH message across practices, to demonstrate if some dental practices generally provided better information than others.

F12: Availability of information

Table 1 compares the availability of information across practices. We found that:

- **26 of dental practices (60%) provided COVID-19 information on their website as well as providing an OOH message.** However:
 - Four of these 26 practices were not open during lockdown.
- The remaining 17 practices (40%) did not provide COVID-19 information on their website and/or did not have an OOH message.
 - Two of these 17 practices did not provide relevant information in either area.

In detail:

- 22 practices provided both an OOH message and COVID-19 related information on their website. They advised the practice was open during lockdown.
- Four practices provided information through their website and in their OOH message but were not open for services during lockdown.
- 11 practices had an OOH message but did not provide any COVID-19 related information on their website.
- Three practices had an OOH message but no website.
- Three other practices had no OOH message but respectively:
 - one practice provided COVID-19 information on their website;
 - one practice did not provide any COVID-19 information; and
 - one practice did not provide any information (they had no OOH message and no website).

No of practices	OOH review	Website Review		
	OOH message?	Website?	Any COVID message?	Open during lockdown?
22 practices	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4 practices	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
11 practices	Yes	Yes	No	n/a (no COVID message)
3 practices	Yes	No	n/a (no website)	n/a (no website)
1 practice	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
1 practice	No	Yes	No	n/a (no COVID message)
1 practice	No	No	n/a (no website)	n/a (no website)

F13: Availability of service-specific information

Table 2 (a, b, and c) compares the availability of the following services across practices:

- Routine appointments;
- Urgent appointments including priority given for urgency or appointments cancelled due to COVID-19; and
- Availability for new patients.

The information is displayed in reverse order of information available i.e. the practices at the top of the table gave less information than those practices at the bottom of the table (this also applies within each grouping).

We found that:

- None of the practices provided all of the information and most provided no or little information on these services
- 18 practices did not provide any information on these services.
- 18 practices gave little advice on these services.
- Five practices provided most of the information.

Specifically, we found:

- **18 practices did not provide any information on these services** - either the information was unavailable (no OOH message, no website or no COVID-19 information) or it was not specified within the COVID-19 information. (Table 2a)

Table 2a: Which practices offered routine appointments; urgent appointments and availability to new patients.						
No of practices	Out of hours message review			Website review		
	Routine appointments offered?	Urgent appointments offered?	Availability for new patients?	Routine appointments offered?	Any priority given for urgency or missed appointments?	Availability to new patients?
18 practices - no information on services						
2 practices	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no website or no COVID info)		
15 practices	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	n/a (no website OR no COVID info OR not open during lockdown)		
1 practice	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified

- **18 practices gave little advice on these services** - in the majority of cases, either the information was unavailable or advice on these services was unspecified within the information. (Table 2b)
- Amongst these 18 practices:
 - **Ten practices did not provide any information on urgent services** (neither in their OOH message or on their website). [highlighted in orange in the table]
 - **Ten practices did not provide any information on availability for new patients** (neither in their OOH message or on their website). [highlighted in blue in the table]

Table 2b: Which practices offered routine appointments; urgent appointments and availability to new patients.						
No of practices	Out of hours message review			Website review		
	Routine appointments offered?	Urgent appointments offered?	Availability for new patients?	Routine appointments offered?	Any priority given for urgency or missed appointments?	Availability to new patients?
18 practices - little information (no information on the majority of services)						
1 practice	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	n/a (no COVID info)	n/a (no COVID info)	n/a (no COVID info)
1 practice	Offered	Not specified	Not specified	n/a (no COVID info)	n/a (no COVID info)	n/a (no COVID info)
1 practice	Offered	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified
2 practices	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	Not specified
2 practices	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Offered
1 practice	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no OOH)	Offered	Not specified	Not specified
2 practices	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not offered	Priority given	Not specified
1 practice	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Offered	Priority given	Not specified
1 practice	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	Not specified	Priority given	Not specified
1 practice	Not specified	Offered	Offered	n/a (no COVID info)	n/a (no COVID info)	n/a (no COVID info)
1 practice	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Priority given	Offered
3 practices	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	Offered
1 practice	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Offered

In the remaining practices (Table 2c):

- Two practices provided information on half of these services. One of these did not provide any information on urgent services, neither in their OOH message or on their website. [highlighted in orange]
- Five practices provided most of the information, either in their OOH message and/or on their website.

Table 2c: Which practices offered routine appointments; urgent appointments and availability to new patients.						
No of practices	Out of hours message review			Website review		
	Routine appointments offered?	Urgent appointments offered?	Availability for new patients?	Routine appointments offered?	Any priority given for urgency or missed appointments?	Availability to new patients?
2 practices - 50% of the information is available						
1 practice	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Offered	Priority given	Offered
1 practice	Offered	Not specified	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	Offered
5 practices - most of the information (more than half of the information is available)						
1 practice	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	Offered	Priority given	Offered
2 practices	Offered	Offered	Not specified	Offered	Not specified	Offered
1 practice	Not offered	Not offered	No availability	Not specified	Not specified	Offered
1 practice	Not offered	Not offered	No availability	Offered	Not specified	Not specified

F14: Availability of advice on emergency services and COVID-19 related information

Table 3 (a, b, and c) shows which practices provided the following to patients:

- Signposting to emergency services;
- Advice or guidance on COVID-19 infection control procedures for patients visiting the practice; and
- The date the information was updated and/or advice as to whether the information was updated in line with government COVID-19 guidance.

The information is displayed in reverse order of information available i.e. the practices at the top of the table gave less information than those practices at the bottom of the table (this also applies within each grouping).

We found:

- Eight practices provided none of this information.
- For 23 practices, most of this information was missing.
- For 11 practices, most of the information was available.
- There was only one practice that provided all of this information in both places.

Specifically,

- **Eight practices provided none of this information** either on their website or in their OOH message. This included no signposting should patients need emergency dental treatment. (Table 3a)

Table 3a: Which practices signposted patients to emergency services, provided COVID-specific information and updated their information?					
No of practices	OOH Review		Website Review		
	COVID Visitors advice?	Signposting to emergency service?	COVID Visitors advice?	Signposting to emergency service?	Information dated or reference to being in line with government guidelines?
8 practices - no information provided					
2	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no COVID message or no website)		
6	Not specified	No signposting	n/a (no website OR no COVID info OR not open during lockdown)		

- For 23 practices, most of this information was missing from their OOH message and/or website. (Table 3b)
- Within these 23 practices:
 - Six practices did not signpost patients to emergency services in one area or the other (either in their OOH message or on their website).

Table 3b: Which practices signposted patients to emergency services, provided COVID-specific information and updated their information?

No of practices	OOH Review		Website Review		
	COVID Visitors advice?	Signposting to emergency service?	COVID Visitors advice?	Signposting to emergency service?	Information dated or reference to being in line with government guidelines?
23 practices - little information (no information on the majority of services)					
1	n/a (no OOH)	n/a (no OOH)	Provided	No signposting	Not provided
1	Not specified	No signposting	Provided	No signposting	Not provided
11	Not specified	Signposting in place	n/a (no website OR no COVID info OR not open during lockdown)		
4	Not specified	No signposting	Provided	No signposting	Either dated or ref made to government guidance
2	Not specified	Signposting in place	Provided	No signposting	Not provided
2	Not specified	Signposting in place	Not provided	No signposting	Either dated and/or ref
1	Provided	Signposting in place	Not provided	No signposting	Not provided
1	Provided	Signposting in place	n/a (no COVID message)	n/a (no COVID message)	n/a (no COVID message)

- However, for 11 practices, most of the information was available on either their website and/or in their OOH message.
- There was one practice that provided all of this information on their website and OOH message. (Table 3c)

Table 3c: Which practices signposted patients to emergency services, provided COVID-specific information and updated their information?

No of practices	OOH Review		Website Review		
	COVID Visitors advice?	Signposting to emergency service?	COVID Visitors advice?	Signposting to emergency service?	Information dated or reference to being in line with government guidelines?
11 practices - most of the information (more than half of the information is available)					
8	Not specified	Signposting in place	Provided	No signposting	Either dated and/or ref made to government guidance
2	Not specified	Signposting in place	Provided	Signposting in place	Not provided
1	Not specified	Signposting in place	Provided	Signposting in place	Date is provided
1 practice - all the information is available					
1	Provided	Signposting in place	Provided	Signposting in place	Ref to govt guidelines

Conclusion

Healthwatch England announced a crisis in dental care in February 2021 as a result of local Healthwatch, including Healthwatch Brighton and Hove, sharing concerns from local people trying to access dental services during the pandemic.

Our review on websites and out of hours messages, only confirmed those concerns.

From the start of the review, we found that almost one half of all Brighton and Hove NHS dental practices either did not have a website, did not provide COVID-19 related information or advised they were not open during lockdown. Of the 40 practices who did have an out of hours message, less than one quarter were explicit in their message, about the services they offered.

When comparing our findings from website and OOH message reviews, we found that information across practices was either not available or lacking in detail. This was notably illustrated by the lack of emergency signposting on practice websites as well as the lack of information on basic services across both OOH messages and practice websites. Throughout both reviews, inconsistent information was the major issue.

While it is recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant upheaval to the health and care system, while other services including GP practices and outpatient services have continued to be available to the public (albeit with some delays and special measures), local people in Brighton & Hove have been seriously let down by dental services during this period.

Unfortunately, the local situation reflects UK-wide challenges. NHS England has been asked to respond but to date has failed to take appropriate action to address the issues with access to NHS dental care.