

Accepting routine (non-urgent) referrals at West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust

Information for patients

West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust (WHHT) is now able to accept referrals for patients who are waiting for a non-urgent (also known as a 'routine') appointment with a specialist.

The trust stopped accepting referrals, apart from urgent or suspected cancer cases, so that it could focus its efforts and resources on treating COVID-19 patients during the early phases of the pandemic.

With fewer patients now being treated for COVID-19, WHHT is working with Herts Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to restart referrals in a way that ensures safety for patients and staff.

The trust will prioritise patients who have the most urgent clinical needs so it may be some time before you actually receive an appointment. When your appointment takes place it may be face to face, or by telephone or a video link but your appointment letter will explain in more detail.

What will happen if my referral has been on hold or cancelled?

If your GP has referred you to WHHT, the CCG will contact you to confirm whether you still need an appointment with a specialist and whether you have had any change in your symptoms. If you still need a hospital appointment your GP will resend your referral to the trust.

If your symptoms have resolved and you no longer need to be seen by a hospital specialist, please see your GP to cancel the referral.

What if my symptoms worsen?

If your symptoms worsen you should see your GP. If needed, your GP will resend your referral to the trust with information about your worsening symptoms so that this can be taken into account.

Can I get a non-urgent referral?

GPs are now able to send non-urgent referrals to WHHT, including those that they hadn't been able to put through until now. Patient referrals will be assessed by a team of senior GPs and hospital specialists who will review each one and decide on

the best course of action.

They will decide whether:

- you need to be seen urgently
- you can have a virtual hospital appointment – a telephone or video consultation
- you can be seen in person, or
- your GP can help you with advice and guidance from a WHHT specialist.

You might need to have diagnostic appointments such as an x-ray or a CT scan in preparation for your appointment. Please do attend these if necessary.

How will appointments be different?

More virtual appointments

WHHT has been carrying out patient consultations by video or telephone where possible during the pandemic and these virtual appointments will continue.

Virtual appointments are more convenient than travelling to a hospital. Reducing the number of visitors to hospitals will reduce the risk of spread of infection.

You will be sent details in your appointment letter explaining what to do if you don't have access to a smartphone or computer or if you have hearing or sight problems or other issues which it makes it difficult to use digital technology.

Safety measures in place at WHHT's hospitals

There are very strong safety and infection control measures in place at WHHT's hospitals to protect patients and staff.

These include:

- Holding appointments in a different area or building from those used for COVID-19 patients
- Staff wearing personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves
- Cleaning rooms between appointments
- Screening patients for COVID-19 symptoms on arrival as explained below.

What will happen when I arrive at hospital?

When you arrive at hospital, please report to the outpatient reception desk 10 minutes before your appointment and book in. Staff will direct you to the relevant waiting area in the outpatient department where you will be met by a member of the outpatient nursing team who will do the following:

- Ask COVID-19 screening questions
- Carry out a temperature check
- Carry out a public health screening check (for new patient appointments only)
- Hand sanitise

- Give you a face mask (if you do not have a covering)
- Provide advice on patient flow restrictions and social distancing measures

Children or people with special needs should be accompanied by an appropriate adult. All other patients should come alone. You can raise any concerns or questions about appointment access issues with the outpatient team when you receive your appointment letter.

Please check the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust website to see the [latest guidance for patients before visiting hospital premises](#).

When will I get an appointment?

WHHT will allocate appointments according to clinical need and how long you have been waiting.

Unfortunately there are many people who are waiting and there are fewer available appointments because of the need for safety. Staff must also carry out essential infection control precautions such as changing their protective equipment (masks and gloves) and cleaning rooms between patients. This can take time and reduces the number of appointment slots.

We understand this may be frustrating but please be assured that you will receive an appointment.

If you are worried about your wait or if your symptoms change or worsen, please do contact your GP.

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01923 217187 or email westherts.pals@nhs.net

