

18 Week Maximum Waiting Time from Referral to Treatment What does this mean to you as a Patient?

Your rights under the NHS Constitution

You have the right to access services within maximum waiting times, unless you choose to wait longer or it is clinically appropriate for you wait longer. The NHS will take all reasonable steps to offer you a range of alternative providers if this is not possible. The waiting times are described in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution.

For routine, non-urgent conditions you have the right to start your treatment within 18 weeks of being referred.

Are any services exempt from the 18 Week Wait?

The following services are exempt from 18 weeks

- Maternity Services
- Non-Consultant led Mental Health services
- Public Health Services commissioned by local authorities

Your 18-Week “Clock”

- **Starting an 18-Week Clock**

Your waiting time starts when the hospital becomes aware of your referral. This is either when the hospital receives a written referral from your GP or when you activate your referral if you are using the “NHS E-Referral” system, which used to be called ‘Choose and Book’.

A waiting time can also start at another hospital, where they then refer you on to the NNUH requesting we take over your care.

Some services are provided outside of the hospital to provide you with an alternative to being referred directly to hospital – these are called “Interface Services”. If you choose to be referred to one of these services then your waiting time starts when this ‘interface service’ becomes aware of your referral. If you need to be referred on from an interface service to hospital care then your original waiting time clock from the Interface Service continues to “tick”.

- **Stopping an 18-week Clock**

Your waiting time stops when the treatment, which your clinician thinks is the best way of treating or managing your condition, is started. Your waiting time also stops if the clinician makes the decision that you do not need hospital treatment for the condition for which you have been referred. If you are discharged back to your GP or a community based therapy service then you do not need hospital treatment and your waiting time stops.

For conditions that require treatment, but not involving surgery, your treatment will start (and so your waiting time will stop), when you are given medication, advice, start therapy or are fitted with an appropriate device.

For conditions that do require surgery your treatment will start (and so your waiting time will stop) on the day you are admitted for surgery.

Sometimes it is clinically more appropriate to actively monitor your condition as opposed to actively treating you; in this case your 18 week clock will stop. If in the future your clinician feels it is appropriate to treat you, then on the day that decision is made a **new** 18-week clock will be started for you and you can expect to start your treatment within 18 weeks of that date.

- **Starting a new 18-week clock**

In certain cases you may start a new 18-week clock. This is normally:

- Following a period of active monitoring (as above) when your clinician feels it is now appropriate to start treating you.
- If you are having a bi-lateral procedure such as two cataract operations, two hip replacements or two knee replacements (one at a time). In these cases your original 18-week clock will stop when you are admitted for your first operation and a new clock will be started when your clinician tells you that you are fit and ready for the second operation.
- If for what-ever reason it is decided that your current treatment plan needs to be changed to something new and substantially different then you will start a new 18-week clock. The clock will stop when your new treatment is started.

- **What if it's not appropriate to treat you in 18 weeks?**

In very few cases it would not be in a patient's best interest to start their treatment within 18 weeks. These cases are known as clinical exceptions. If we do not feel that it is in your best interest to treat you within 18 weeks and if we did it might compromise your care then we will explain this to you.

- **What happens if you are not well enough to have your operation?**

Sometimes patients are not well enough to have their operation. If this is just a temporary illness such as a minor cough or cold then your admission may be delayed and your 18 week clock will continue to tick and we will try and admit you as soon as possible when you are well.

Sometimes during the course of investigations or at pre-operative assessment other illnesses or conditions may be discovered. In some cases, for example the discovery of a previously un-diagnosed heart condition, it may be unsafe to proceed with your operation because of the risks this might involve.

If you are medically unfit for a longer period (e.g. two weeks or more), the clinician responsible for your care may decide to refer you back to your GP for management of the condition which has made you unfit for your operation and your 18 week clock will be stopped. When you are fit enough to have surgery, which may be quite some time ahead, your GP will re-refer you to the hospital and you will start a new 18 week clock.

- **Offering you an Appointment / Admission date**

If you do require an outpatient appointment or surgery, we will make you a 'reasonable offer' for your appointment / admission date. We will try to provide you with two reasonable offer dates when we contact you; however, this may not always be possible.

By reasonable, we mean that the date offered to you must be more than 3 weeks ahead of the date when the offer is made. This is normally the first available clinic / operating list, 3 weeks ahead of the date that the person at the hospital who is booking your operation speaks to you. If we are able to offer you an earlier date (Short Notice) and you chose to accept this, the earlier date becomes a 'reasonable offer' as we have agreed this with you.

If you turn-down the reasonable offer and choose a later date, the Trust has agreed that any patient who chooses to delay their operation for more than 28 days may be potentially putting themselves at harm or compromising the outcome of their treatment.

If you choose to delay your appointment / operation after receiving a reasonable offer of a date from us, you may be referred back to the care of your GP.

Your notes will be reviewed by your Consultant to see if this is clinically appropriate and the Consultant may decide to continue to treat you or you may be referred back to your GP for them to clinically manage your condition as appropriate.

- **Helping us treat you within 18 Weeks**

In order to treat you and other patients within 18 weeks we will always try to negotiate an appointment with you and offer you a reasonable offer of appointment. We ask all referring GP's to ensure that you are fit, ready, willing and able to attend for any appointment and undergo any treatment that may be required.

- **If you've already received treatment – please let us know and help with our valuable NHS resources.**

If you have received treatment at another hospital for the condition for which you were referred, or believe that you no longer require or wish to have surgery, please let your consultants secretary know and they will be able to advice on any further course of action required and, if appropriate, remove you from the waiting list. Please contact us by calling the main hospital switchboard on 01603 286286 and ask to speak to your consultants secretary.

The Trust has agreed the following rules to allow us to manage your 18 week pathway effectively. All of these are in line with the national rules on measuring 18 Week waiting times.

- **If you do not attend your first out-patient appointment without giving us notice**

If the clinician to whom you have been referred does not consider that it would compromise your care, you will be discharged back to your GP and your 18 week pathway will be stopped. You will need to make contact with your GP who, if appropriate will refer you again to the hospital. Your 18 week clock will start from zero again when you are re-referred and we receive your referral.

If the clinician considers it is important that we re-book your appointment then your clock will start on the day that we agree your new appointment date (not on the date of your new appointment).

- **If you do not attend any subsequent appointments without giving us notice.**

To encourage patients to make the best use of NHS resources and to discourage unnecessary waste, the Trust has agreed that, unless there are genuine extenuating circumstances, patients who do not to attend any subsequent appointments without giving us notice, will be highlighted to the clinician responsible for your care to review.

At this point your clinician will take a view as to whether discharging you back to the care of your GP will compromise your care or not. If your care would not be compromised then you will be discharged back to your GP and your 18 week pathway will be stopped. You will have to make contact with your GP who, if appropriate will refer you again to the hospital. Your 18 week clock will start from zero again when you are re-referred and we receive your referral.

- **If you need to cancel and re-book an appointment / admission.**

If for whatever reason you need to cancel and re-book your appointment please let us know as soon as possible. If you cancel and re-book an appointment anywhere along your 18 week pathway, (e.g. at outpatients, diagnostic or admission) more than twice, and if it does not compromise your care, then we may discharge you back to your GP after a clinician has reviewed your case..

If we do not discharge you, because you have cancelled and re-booked your appointments we may not be able to treat you in 18-weeks. Furthermore, by choosing to delay your treatment you may have given up your right to treatment by an alternative provider because you have chosen to wait longer.

- **You may choose to wait longer for appointments / treatment which will then make it impossible to treat you within 18 weeks.**

In such cases you are deemed to have chosen to wait longer than 18-weeks. By choosing to wait longer than 18-weeks you give up your right to treatment by an alternative provider.

- **Contacting you about your appointments.**

In order to make the best use of our resources we try to make sure that patients are aware of their appointments in order to do this:

- We will call you by telephone to arrange an appointment with you;
 - We will spread these calls over two different days and try at different times of day;
 - If we cannot speak to you we will try and leave a message asking you to contact us;
 - If we cannot speak to you then we will write to you asking you to contact us within seven days to arrange an appointment.
 - With your permission we may also use text messaging
- **What if you feel you have been waiting too long?**

If you feel that your treatment has not started within 18 weeks since you were referred then please contact us to discuss this.

- **What we will do**

We will check how long you have been waiting and what is planned to happen to you next.

We will confirm to you if it is or is not possible to treat you within 18 weeks

- **If it's not possible to treat you within 18 weeks**

We can offer you the choice of staying under the care of your current consultant and wait longer than 18 weeks for the start of your treatment
(*Note: this will still be recorded as a failure on our part*)

We will investigate and if possible offer you a clinically appropriate alternative provider who would be able to treat you sooner

- **If we cannot offer you an alternative provider who could treat you sooner**

If we are unable to offer you an alternative provider who could treat you sooner than us, then we will confirm this to you and advise you who to contact next. This will normally be the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) who is responsible for commissioning your healthcare. For certain specialist services this could be NHS England.

- **If your condition deteriorates significantly whilst you are waiting.**

It is important that should you have any significant changes in the condition for which you were initially referred or your symptoms have worsened, these are brought to the attention of your GP or consultants Secretary.

If you want to know more about your right to be treated within 18 Weeks

If you want to know more about your rights under the NHS Constitution please visit the following web site:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england>

If you want to know more about the rules governing 18 Week waiting times

<http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/rtt-waiting-times/rtt-guidance/>

For further information and to read the full RTT Access Policy – please click here