



East Staffordshire

District Patients Engagement Group

Website: <http://districtpatientsgroup.org/>

Access to GP Surgeries

As the Chair and Vice-Chair, of the East Staffordshire District Patient Engagement Group, we want to give you some insight into the current situation regarding access to your GP surgery.

Whilst we, the public, see “life in general” is returning to some sort of normality the Health Services are still having to follow strict COVID protocols. We want to take this opportunity to outline the current situation.

GP Surgeries have **NEVER** been closed during the pandemic. It is the method of access to the service that has changed. This is due to strict protocols including:

- 2metre distancing which effects the number of staff that can be within restricted spaces such as the “back offices.”
- The stringent clean down protocols between patient consultations.
- How many people can be within the surgery reception and waiting room at any one time. This can have a major effect depending on the size of available space within a surgery and will vary from surgery to surgery.
- The telephone systems within surgeries have limited phone lines and these need to deal with both incoming and outgoing calls. Some surgeries have reassigned staff to handle calls, but this means that other services they are responsible for may be put back, e.g., prescriptions processing. Recent data has shown that incoming calls into surgeries, since the latest relaxation of restrictions to the public, have been at the levels never seen before with more than a 50% increase in call volume.
- Surgeries have the additional work of arranging the patient appointments for the vaccinations which again is an additional huge task. In addition, they are responsible for the vaccination roll out within the Care Homes within their area.

GP Surgeries are going through many changes, and some will now have additional services to offer their patients. These include Clinical Pharmacists, Care Coordinators, Social Prescribers to name just a few.

This could well mean that when you contact your surgery for an appointment the receptionist may ask you several questions regarding your reason for calling. Based on the information patients give, they may direct you to someone other than a GP.

This is **NOT** done to stop you talking or seeing the GP, it is to direct you to a professional who can deal quickly and efficiently with your enquiry.

The Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Clinical Commissioning Groups will be sending out communications regarding GP Access and we have offered the assistance of the East Staffordshire District Patient Engagement Group and individual Patient Participation Groups in circulating any communications.

We hope the information is of help and we will continue to update as more communication comes out.

Meanwhile can we please ask you to understand what the surgeries are facing and when you contact, please treat the staff, especially the receptionists with the courtesy they deserve. Remember that they too are patients.

Thank you.

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Open to all patients in East Staffordshire's 18 GP Practices.

- (i). General Health-related questions.
- (ii). Queries around COVID-19 and vaccinations.
- (iii). Local information.
- (iv). Signposting to further information.

We can't discuss specific illnesses or give medical advice.