

Good dental health is an important part of good overall health for everybody, including people with HIV.

Who is eligible for NHS dentistry?

NHS dental care is available to those who are eligible for NHS medical care. This includes all people classified as being normally resident in the UK. Information on access to NHS treatment and care for overseas visitors to the UK is available on the Department of Health's website.

But unlike NHS medical care provided by your HIV clinic and GP, you will be charged for NHS dental care unless you are:

- Under 18
- Under 19 and in full-time education
- Pregnant, or have given birth in the last twelve months
- Receiving some income-related benefits, including Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance.

More information on who is exempt from charges for NHS dentistry is available from the NHS website.

What treatment is available from NHS dentists?

NHS dentistry provides general dental check-ups, including X-rays, scale and polish, treatment such as fillings, extractions, root canal work, and more complex procedures including crowns, bridges and caps.

It is also important to note that only treatment to protect and maintain your dental and oral health is available from the NHS. Cosmetic dentistry, such as tooth whitening, large white fillings or white crowns are not available from the NHS, and if you want this work done you will have to pay for private treatment.

There are three levels of cost for NHS dentistry. These are:

- £17 – This charge includes examinations, X-rays and a descaling and tooth polish.
- £47 – This charge covers all the services provided for £17 plus treatment including fillings, root canal treatment and extractions.
- £204 – This charge includes all treatment provided for £17 plus more complicated work such as crowns, dentures and bridges.

The charge for NHS prescriptions from your dentist is £7.40 – the same as prescriptions from your GP and you will have to pay this charge unless you are entitled to free NHS prescriptions. Information on how to get help with NHS charges is available on the NHS website.

How do I find an NHS dentist?

In theory, everybody who is eligible for NHS treatment and care should be able to access NHS dentistry. But in reality, many people find it difficult to find a dentist who accepts NHS patients. Dentists don't have 'practice areas' like GPs, so you don't have to live close to your dentist and you can go to any NHS dentist you like – provided you are able to find one that is prepared to see new patients.

It's also important to note that, unlike your GP, you don't have to register with a dentist. Essentially you can choose any NHS dentist you like – or more likely look around until you find a dentist who is prepared to offer NHS appointments.

To find an NHS dentist near you, try calling NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

If you have access to the internet, then this website can help you find a dentist: www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories

It provides details of NHS dentists within the area of your primary care trust (PCT) – the part of the NHS that commissions local NHS services – and tells you whether or not they are accepting new patients.

Community Dental Services

Some dentists have a contract from the NHS to participate in the Community Dental Service, which is intended to ensure that people who might have difficulty accessing normal dental services still receive dental care.

People with HIV are one of the groups for whom the Community Dental Service are meant to provide treatment and care. Your HIV clinic will be able to provide you with details of your local Community Dental Service. Or you can find your local service by using the search term 'Community Dental Service' on the NHS website.

Dental Access Centres

These provide NHS dental treatment and care to people who cannot find a regular NHS dentist. They are situated across the UK. They offer an appointment-based service on a first-come, first-served basis. Normal NHS eligibility criteria and charges apply.

To find out if there is one near you, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or by search for 'Dental Access Centre' on the NHS website.

Private dental care

There is no shortage of dentists willing to accept new private patients. But charges for private dental treatment and care are normally considerably higher than those of the NHS – for example a routine examination with X-rays and a scale and polish can end up costing around £70 as opposed to £16.50 on the NHS, and a crown can cost around £400 compared to £204 if provided by the NHS.

Your HIV status

In the UK, it is against the law for a dentist to refuse to treat you or discriminate against you in any way because you have HIV. Normal hygiene precautions in a dental surgery are enough to protect both you and the dentist/dental nurse from the risk of any infections.

You will be asked to provide a medical history at your first appointment with a dentist, and this will include a question about infection with HIV. The dentist should really only need to know if a person has HIV so they can check for signs of HIV disease in the mouth.

All staff at dentists, whether NHS or private, should respect and maintain your confidentiality.