



Your health, your rights

Hospital waiting times: how quickly you should receive hospital care

Who is this factsheet for and what is it about?

- This factsheet is for anyone who requires hospital treatment in any part of Scotland.
- This factsheet sets out how long you can expect to wait once your GP refers you to hospital.
- The 2012 Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities sets out your right to start to receive agreed inpatient and day case treatment within 12 weeks of agreeing to it with the clinician.

If I get referred to hospital how long can I expect to wait?

- NHSScotland will try to make your wait as short as possible.
- Your GP will let you know how long you are likely to wait.
- The NHS will try to give you a minimum of 7 days notice of an offer of appointment (this is generally considered to be reasonable). If you refuse two or more reasonable offers of appointment, your Health Board may (if reasonable and clinically appropriate) either refer you back to your GP or reset your waiting time clock to zero.

Most patients should start their treatment within 18 weeks from when your GP refers you.

- You should get an outpatient consultation, diagnostic test (if required) and treatment all within 18 weeks from your GP referral to hospital.
- It is not possible to meet this target for all patients - for example, because some patients may have to get many tests before a diagnosis can be made and the necessary treatment determined.
- You must be treated within 12 weeks of being diagnosed and agreeing to inpatient or day case treatment. This is known as the treatment time guarantee – more detail is provided at the section

below headed Treatment Time Guarantee.

- The treatment time guarantee will operate within the 18 weeks referral to treatment waiting time target. The 2 scenarios below give examples of what this will mean in practice:
 - your outpatient appointment is 4 weeks after being referred to hospital by your GP. At that appointment you and the health professional agree you require inpatient or day case treatment. This means that you are eligible for the treatment time guarantee and the treatment must start within 12 weeks from the date of the outpatient appointment; or
 - your outpatient appointment is 4 weeks after being referred to hospital by your GP. Following that appointment you have to undergo 4 different diagnostic tests to determine your illness and appropriate treatment . You and the health professional then agree that you require inpatient or day case treatment - this has taken 17 weeks from your GP referral. This means that from the date of you agreeing treatment you must be treated within 12 weeks (in accordance with the treatment time guarantee). This wait, however will clearly and necessarily exceed the 18 weeks targets but the treatment time guarantee will ensure that your wait for the inpatient and day case treatment is no longer than the maximum 12 weeks wait from the date when you agreed to the treatment.

Treatment Time Guarantee

- The Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 introduced a new duty on Health Boards to deliver the treatment time guarantee which means that all patients who are due to receive planned treatment on an inpatient or day case basis have a right to start to receive that treatment within a maximum of 12 weeks of agreeing to proceed with treatment.
- The appropriate health professional must ensure that you are provided with the appropriate information to enable you to fully participate in the decision about your treatment.
- Any inpatient or day case treatment which you agree must start within 12 weeks of agreeing to it (subject to your availability to attend appointments).
- The treatment time guarantee does not apply to the following services:
 - assisted reproduction (treatment to help woman become pregnant)

- obstetrics services (the care of pregnant mothers and their babies before and after the birth)
- organ and tissue transplantation (moving an organ or tissue from one body to another)
- some back treatments including injections and surgery
- surgery to correct curvature of the spine.
- If a Health Board exceeds your treatment time guarantee they must:
 - offer you the next available appointment having regard to your availability
 - provide you with an explanation of why the Board did not start your agreed treatment within 12 weeks.
 - provide you with details of the advice and support available. In particular the patient advice and support service.
 - Provide you with information on how to give feedback or comments or raise concerns or complaints.

What should I do if my agreed treatment does not start within 12 weeks?

- You should contact the hospital as soon as you become aware that you have waited more than 12 weeks.

In a service that deals with more than half a million inpatient and day cases each year there may be the occasional administrative error. If you have exceeded the treatment time guarantee the actions above will be taken by the hospital.

Giving you information

- The NHS will:
 - write to advise that you are eligible for the treatment time guarantee.
 - provide you with clear and accurate information about how the waiting time for the treatment time guarantee is calculated.
 - write to you of the consequences to the calculation of the treatment time guarantee if you:
 - refuse two or more offers of an appointment
 - do not attend your appointment.
 - cancel an agreed appointment on three or more occasions
 - advise that you are going to be unavailable, for example, if you are going on holiday.

- have another medical condition which needs to be resolved before the agreed treatment can go ahead, for example, high blood pressure.
- The Scottish Government have also set a few other key waiting times targets for example if your GP refers you urgently to a hospital for investigation because they think you may have cancer, and you are then found to have cancer, you should start treatment within 2 months from referral.

What can I do to help the NHS?

- Tell your hospital or clinic you are attending if you change your name, address or phone number. This is to make sure your hospital can contact you.
- If you are referred to hospital let them know about any dates when you won't be able to go to hospital – for example because you are going on holiday. Your hospital will advise you of the impact of this on your waiting time.
- Be on time for appointments and hospital admissions. If you are going to be late, phone and let the hospital know.
- If you can't keep a hospital appointment let the hospital know as soon as possible so they can offer it to someone else. Your hospital will advise you of the impact on your waiting time.
- If you do not inform the hospital that you can't keep an appointment and do not attend then you may be referred back to you GP.

How can I find out more?

You can find out more about anything in this factsheet, or get **The Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities**, the **Your health, your rights** factsheets or other leaflets and factsheets listed below from:

- GP surgeries, hospitals and other places where you receive NHS services
- www.hris.org.uk (alternative formats available) or at www.nhsinform.co.uk
- the NHS inform Helpline on **0800 22 44 88** (lines are open every day from 8am to 10pm).
- the **Patient Advice & Support Service (PASS)** at your local citizens advice bureau (find your nearest bureau on the internet at www.cas.org.uk or in your local phone book). PASS is independent and provides free, confidential information, advice and support to anyone who uses the NHS in Scotland.

Information about health rights

- **The Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities** gives a summary of what you can expect when you use the NHS in Scotland, together with your rights and responsibilities.
- The series of **Your health, your rights** factsheets tell you more about what these rights mean for you:
 - **Access:** your rights when accessing NHS services in Scotland.
 - **Communication and participation:** the right to be informed, and involved in decisions, about health care and services.
 - **Confidentiality:** the right for your personal health information to be kept secure and confidential.
 - **Respect:** the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
 - **Safety:** the right to safe and effective care.
 - **Feedback and complaints:** the right to have a say about your care and have any concerns or complaints dealt with.

For more about health rights see:

- **Consent – it’s your decision** explains how you should be involved in decisions about your health care and treatment.
- **How to see your health records** explains your right to see or have a copy of your health record.
- **Health care for overseas visitors** is a set of factsheets explaining what NHS services overseas visitors can expect to receive while they are in Scotland.

Information for young people

- **Consent – your rights** explains how you should be involved in decisions about your health care and treatment.
- **Confidentiality – your rights** tells you how the health service keeps information about you private.
- **Have your say! Your right to be heard** tells you how to give feedback or make a complaint about the NHS.

Information for carers

- **Caring and consent** explains your right to be involved in decisions about the health care of the adult you care for.
- Information about health services
- **Getting NHS dental treatment in Scotland** tells you how to use NHS dental services in Scotland.
- **It’s okay to ask** gives useful tips and questions you can ask during your health care appointments.

- **The NHS Chronic Medication Service at your local pharmacy** tells you about an NHS service for people with a long-term condition.
- **Your guide to free NHS eye examinations in Scotland** gives information about free NHS eye examinations in Scotland for all UK residents.

We have tried our best to make sure that the information in this factsheet is correct. However, the factsheet is not part of the Charter of Patient Rights and Responsibilities. It is for guidance only so you should not rely on it as a complete statement of the law.

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