

Appointment and Access Change FAQs

1. Why are we changing the appointment system?

The demand for General Practice is at an unprecedented level, and our current system is no longer suitable under these pressures. We are introducing a new system to better utilise our existing capacity, improve the patient journey, and prevent staff burnout.

As our population continues to grow and health needs become more complex, the challenges we face intensify. For more information on the current pressures facing GP practices, you can read more at <https://rebuildgp.co.uk/for-our-patients>

Key Issues with the Current System:

- **Booking Bottleneck at 8 am:**
 - Appointments currently release at 8 am, leading to an overwhelming surge in calls and a stressful experience for patients.
 - The new system will aim to smooth patient access and reduce the need to call at 8 am.
 - **Limited Appointment Options:**
 - Patients often face two extremes: same-day appointments that are quickly filled or pre-bookable slots available only six weeks in advance.
 - The new system will prioritise routine capacity and move away from a day-by-day release of appointments.
 - **Impact on Staff:**
 - The current system puts extraordinary pressure on our Patient Services Team, who manage immense call volumes and assist frustrated patients without appointments.
 - The new system will reduce this pressure by spreading demand more evenly and involving clinical staff in the appointment booking process.
 - **Inefficient Use of Capacity:**
 - The current system often results in double bookings, where patients need to return for face-to-face appointments after initial telephone consultations.
 - The new system will introduce clinician-led appointment booking, an increased proportion of face-to-face appointments, and longer 15-minute appointments to optimise capacity.
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2. What are the key changes?

The new model involves two main changes:

1. **How requests are submitted and processed:**

- Patients will use a new digital triage tool called **Rapid Health** to submit their requests.
- The triage form can be completed by the patient or by a practice staff member on their behalf.
- The form provides us with a better understanding of your request to ensure the right care is provided at the right time.
- Based on your submission, you will either be offered an appointment or have your request reviewed by our triaging GPs.

2. Appointment diary structure:

- Increased routine capacity for non-urgent issues.
- Appointments will be released in a tiered fashion to better accommodate different needs.
- Longer 15-minute face-to-face appointments will be introduced.
- Clinics will align with the British Medical Association's Safe Working Guidance.

3. How will I raise a request or book an appointment moving forward?

• **Via the Website:**

- The quickest way to book an appointment is through our website.
- Click on the booking link, select the appropriate request type, and complete the triage form.
- At the end of the form, you will either be offered an appointment or your request will be submitted to the practice for review by the triage team.

• **By Phone:**

- If you cannot submit your request digitally, call the practice and speak to our Patient Services Team.
- They will complete the triage form on your behalf.

• **In person at the practice**

- You will still be able to raise requests and book appointments by visiting the practice. We will have booking stations available to use.

4. What if I don't have internet access or struggle with technology?

Wherever possible, we will ask patients to use the digital form, but contacting the practice via phone or the front desk will still be options. The digital form is the primary option because it provides patients with the quickest route of access and helps prioritise phone access for those without access to a digital tool.

We have involved Healthwatch West Sussex in reviewing our approach to ensure that any risk to particular patients or patient groups is considered and addressed.

5. What are the benefits of the new system?

- **Improved Access:**
 - Smoother and more consistent access to appointments.
 - **Better Use of Capacity:**
 - Clinician-led appointment booking and longer face-to-face appointments.
 - **Reduced Stress:**
 - Less pressure on the phone lines at 8 am and a more balanced approach to appointment scheduling.
 - **Enhanced Patient Journey:**
 - Requests are triaged to ensure you receive the right care at the right time.
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6. What happens when I submit a request to the practice?

After completing the triage form, you will either be offered an appointment, which you can book directly through Rapid Health, or your request will be submitted to the practice for review by our Triage Team, which includes two GPs and members of our Patient Services Team.

Once the triage team receives your request, the GPs will assess and manage it appropriately. This system allows GPs to handle cases that previously required patients to call at 8 am to secure an appointment. Approximately 25% of requests are expected to be resolved without the need for an appointment. Additionally, GPs will have the ability to book appointments directly or refer patients to alternative providers, such as pharmacies, where appropriate.

7. How will I know if my request has been successfully submitted? And how long will it take for my request to be reviewed?

After completing the triage form, you will receive confirmation that your request has been submitted. Depending on your responses, you will either be offered an appointment or have your request reviewed by our triage team.

We will review and respond to all submitted requests within 24 – 48 hours.

8. How can I learn more?

The appointment page on our website contains a detailed overview of our change to the new system. We will share updates about our new appointment system on our website and on our Social Media Platforms.

There are informational leaflets at the practice if you would like a hard copy.

We are scheduling two live demonstration sessions where you can learn more about the new system and ask any questions.

- **Session 1:** Wednesday, 12th February on MS teams 6-7 pm
- **Session 2:** Thursday, 27th February on MS teams 6-7 pm

Please visit our website to access the joining link for these sessions. If you don't have access to the virtual sessions, let our team know, and we will assist you.

9. How can I share concerns, comments or suggestions about the new system?

We have a designated feedback form on our website for patients to raise any feedback. This form will be used to gather overall themes around feedback and concerns that patients have relating to our new appointment system.

We won't be able to respond to each form individually.

10. What if I encounter technical issues with the triage tool?

If you experience any technical difficulties, please contact our Patient Services Team, who will guide you through the process or complete the form on your behalf.

11. When does the new system go live?

The new system will go live on **10th March 2025**. We appreciate your cooperation and patience as we transition to this improved way of working.
