

# NHS Dentistry In Rutland

January 2024



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# Background



In 2022 only 18% of the adult population in Rutland accessed NHS dental care<sup>1</sup>. The Healthwatch Rutland (HWR) 2022 quick poll resulted in a snapshot of the Rutland people's experiences. Since then, we have campaigned for improved access but feedback from the public has continued to be negative. So, 18 months on, we launched another dentistry poll to gather more recent experiences to support our continued pressure for improvements.

# Key Findings



- 59% of respondents were unable to get an NHS dental appointment in the last 12 months.
- There are reports of people feeling pressure to spend more money on what they consider to be unnecessary, cosmetic treatments such as teeth whitening through private clinics.
- Most people attend a dentist locally - 61% of people travel less than 5 miles.
- Some people feel that they have no choice but to attend private surgeries even though they cannot afford to do so.
- There were 12 positive comments about Rutland dentistry care.

# Method



The quick poll was launched on the Healthwatch Rutland website<sup>2</sup> in September 2023 and ran through to November 2023. We also spoke about the poll at outreach sessions, shared it on social media and featured it in our monthly newsletters. Like our previous poll, it was designed to take just a couple of minutes to complete with 3 multiple choice questions and 1 open question to encourage free-text comments. We received a total of 123 responses. It should be noted that this format of quick response poll is designed as a 'temperature check' of service-user experiences and does not collect information about the demography of respondents, nor does it seek to be encompassing of all ages and accessibilities etc. The results are therefore not inclusive and representative of the Rutland population.

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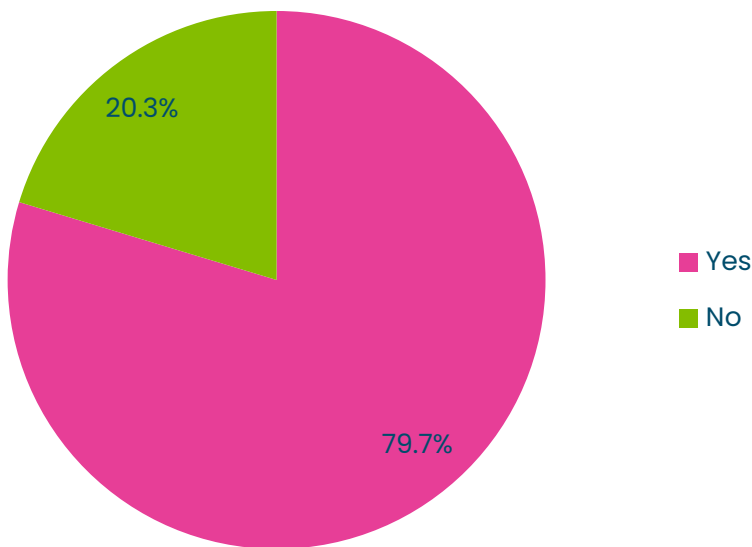
<sup>1</sup> [Report No. 145-2022 - Access to NHS Dental Services within Rutland.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [www.healthwatchrutland.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchrutland.co.uk)

# What people told us

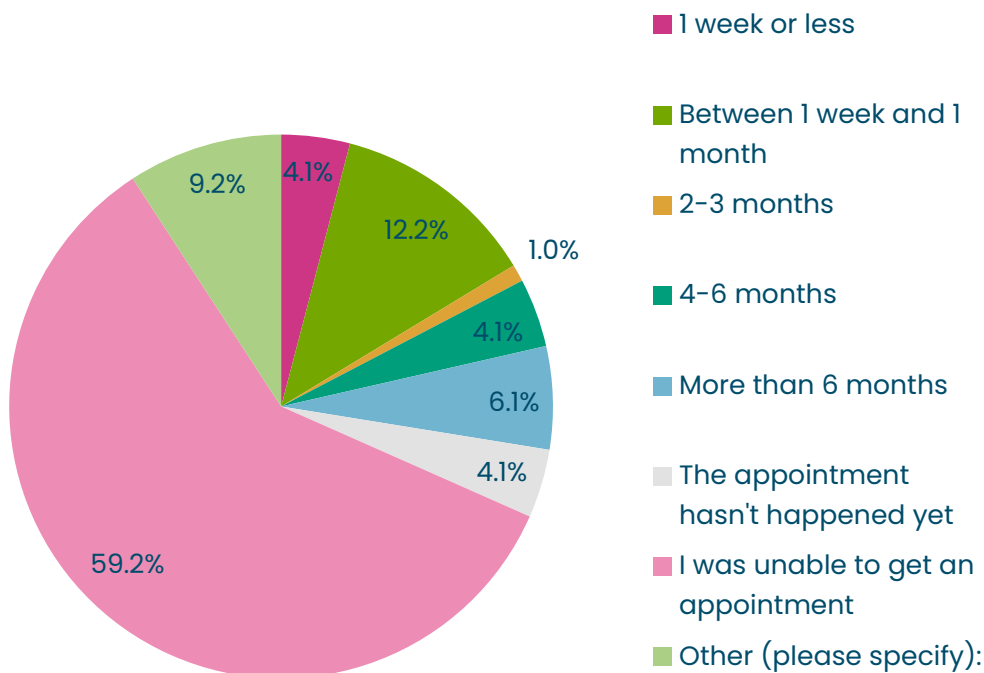


Question 1 – Have you tried to get an NHS dental appointment in the last 12 months?



98 respondents (80%) had tried to get an NHS dental appointment in the last 12 months, 25 respondents (20%) had not tried to get an appointment.

Question 2 – How long did you wait for the appointment to happen?



Most people (59%) were unable to get an appointment. Out of the people who were able to get an appointment, the highest percentage had a wait of between 1 week and 1 month.

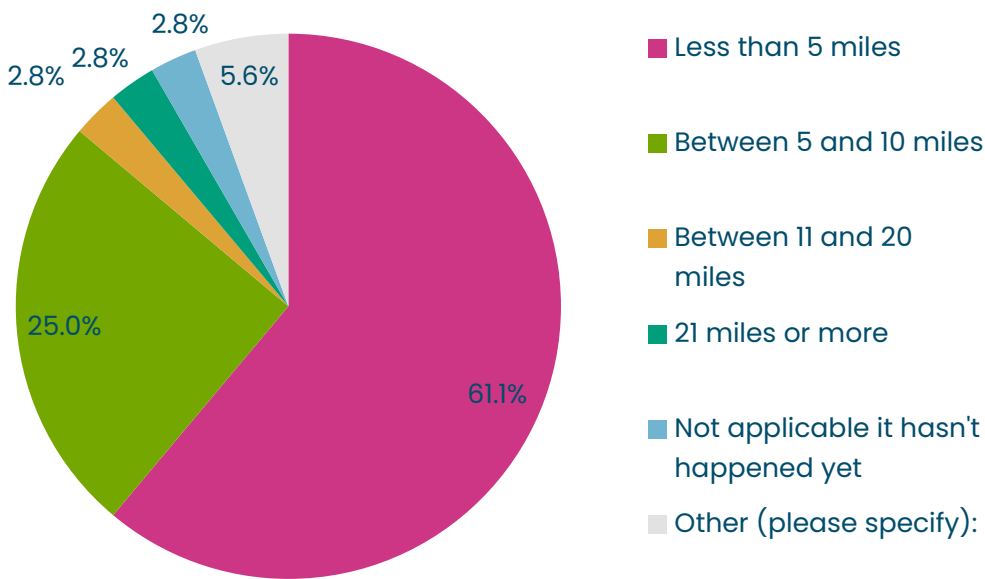
Some of the 'other' category responses included:

"I have to book my next appointment as I leave my current appointment, else I won't be able to get one and I risk being booted off the books."

"6 months. I tend to book straight after an appointment."

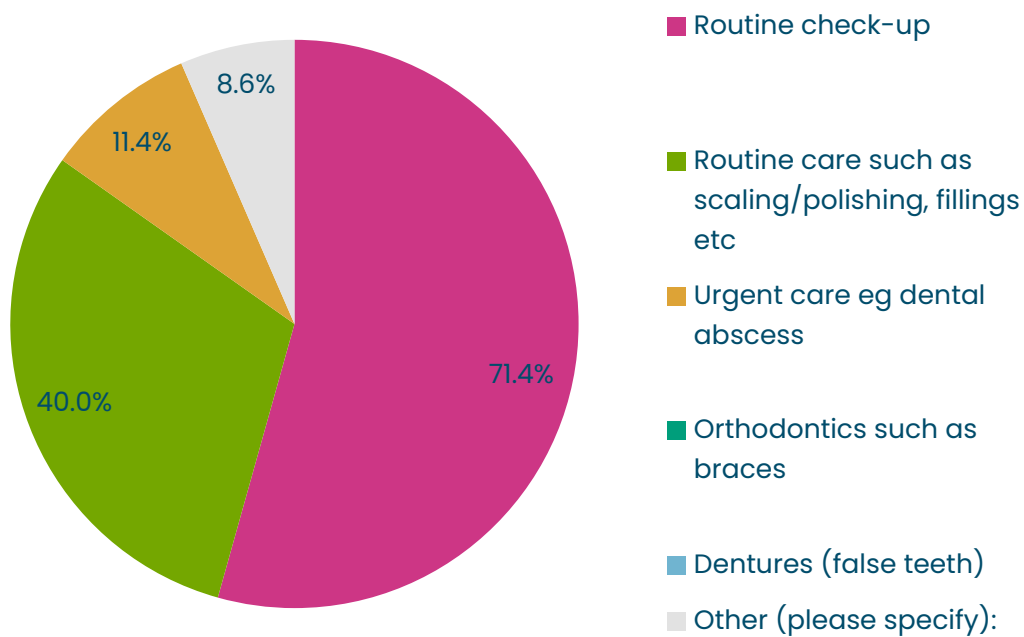
"Routine examinations are booked on a yearly basis for myself. If emergency treatment is required, they do their best to see you same day, then give an appointment as soon as possible for temporary treatment."

**Question 3 - Approximately how far did you have to travel to reach your appointment?**



86% of respondents travel less than 10 miles to their dentist surgery. 1 person travels over 21 miles for their treatment and another stated that they travel between 11 and 20 miles to access an NHS dentist of their choice.

#### Question 4 - What did your NHS appointment involve?



Most respondents reported that they attended the dentist in the last 12 months for a routine appointment which included a general check-up or scaling, polishing and/or fillings. None of the respondents attended an orthodontic practice or had a denture related appointment. In the 'other' feedback, people reported appointments linked to; urgent care, a broken tooth and guidance with a gum problem.

**Question 5 -** What would you like to tell us about your experience? (For example, any positive or negative comments on finding an NHS dentist or not finding one, time between making appointment and it happening, quality of care, effects on wellbeing etc.)

This question resulted in a variety of different answers which fall into the following themes:

#### Unable to access an NHS dentist

"I have tried several times, through 111, to get an emergency appointment for two very urgent and very painful dental issues for well over a year now. I can't afford to go private and just cannot get an appointment with the only NHS dentist here, even for an emergency".

“None of the numerous dentists in Oakham or the surrounding areas are accepting NHS patients. This has resulted in me not being able to see a dentist as their costs are just not affordable for me, being on disability [benefits]. My children and grandchildren are also walking around with toothache and are not able to see a dentist either! My granddaughter has been sent home twice with toothache!”

“Me and my family were part of an NHS dental practice pre COVID-19 and then, approximately 2 years ago, we were informed that our dentist is no longer NHS and is private only. We have not been able to find an NHS dentist for our family and cannot afford private dental care. Our children have not visited a dentist since pre covid.”

Children are eligible for free NHS dental care. This is important to establish good routines of oral health throughout life. However, children’s dental health remains a significant public health concern with approximately 37,000 hospital admissions of children to extract decayed teeth in 2019/20 nationally. The estimated cost to the NHS of all tooth extractions in children is £50 million per year, most of which were due to avoidable tooth decay.<sup>3</sup> The NHS dental access rate for children and young people in Rutland has been rising since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, from 13% to 42% in 2022, which is still below the pre-pandemic level.<sup>4</sup>



NHS advice includes: ‘Take your child to the dentist when their first milk teeth appear. This is so they become familiar with the environment and get to know the dentist. The dentist can advise you on how to prevent decay and identify any oral health problems at an early stage. Just opening

the child’s mouth for the dentist to take a look at is useful practice for the future.’<sup>5</sup>



<sup>3</sup> [Report No. 145-2022 - Access to NHS Dental Services within Rutland.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Report No. 18-2023 Oral Health Draft JSNA Jan 23.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums/taking-care-of-childrens-teeth/>

## Positive Experiences

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“My dental practice is excellent. The dentist and staff are friendly and welcoming. I have had a deep filling done by my dentist and she was particularly professional and knowledgeable. I felt very confident and committed in her care. First time ever!!”

“There is only 1 NHS dentist at my practice and he works Friday and Saturday only. They are very good and will see you in between your 6 month regular appointment.”

## No option but private dentistry

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Through worry of cost or not being able to afford private treatment charges, people are delaying seeking treatment, which is then causing more issues and, as a result, costs more money.

“My dentist changed to private. I have two children, a check-up costs over £100 for us all. A filling costs twice as much. I have tried to contact other NHS dentists but none are taking on patients. I have waited until I have had extreme pain from an abscess to seek help purely due to cost and had to have the tooth removed (privately at a large cost!!)”

“Our dentist moved to private practice only and there was no other NHS dentist within 10 miles that me and my family could join. Since then, I have had to pay considerable amounts for private dentistry which has led to delays in seeking treatment and caused my issues to become worse.”

## Being encouraged to spend more money than necessary through private dentists

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Private dental care is available to anyone, and they often offer a wider range of services than the NHS. Private dental care, however, comes at a higher cost in comparison to NHS services and people who are entitled to free NHS care (e.g.



during pregnancy, on benefits, low income etc) are being denied the treatment to which they are entitled.

"I had to go private and have stopped going to the dentist due to the 'hard sell' tactics"

"I can get an appointment for a check-up, but all work is private. There is also pressure to have extra work done like whitening, implants and seeing the hygienist"

"Could not find an NHS dentist. Enrolled with private dentist but will not go back there as they constantly try and sell unnecessary, expensive treatments"

## Cost in general

"Simply have to hope that I have no issues and continue to look after my teeth to the best of my ability. My partner has not been so lucky, and we have just spent a lot of our savings getting him treatment. We are first time buyers, attempting to make a new way in the world and to be contributing members of society, but a broken system makes this challenging."

We received various comments referring to people either having to borrow money for dentistry treatment or having to cut down on other necessities to pay their private dentistry bill.

"Had to pay private and put it on a credit card as treatment was nearly £400! Unaffordable for a hard-working person. An NHS dentist should be available to everyone."

"We now find that we have to sign up for Dentiplan. Not what we had envisioned in our old age. Do we have teeth fixed, heating on or buy food?"

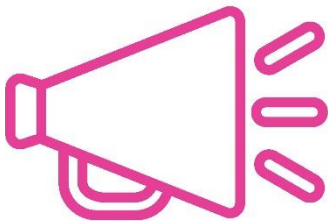
## Negative experiences

"I tried everywhere to get an appointment with an NHS dentist as I had raging toothache. Eventually pulled my tooth out myself"

We received 2 negative comments which were specifically linked to dentistry during pregnancy;

"I am on maternity leave and should have free treatment during my pregnancy and maternity leave. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find an NHS dentist locally even though I regularly look. My son is now 5 months old and have been trying to get him (registered) into a dentist since he was born."

"No appointments available for my pregnant daughter. Had to pay £1,700 for the ante natal dental care for her. This is a disgrace! If we hadn't stepped in to pay for it, she would have had rotten teeth during her pregnancy."



**Providing you have a valid maternity exemption certificate (MatEx) which is issued from a midwife or GP, you are entitled to free NHS dental treatment if you are pregnant when you start your treatment and for 12 months after your baby is born<sup>6</sup>.**

## Comparisons with the previous poll

The Healthwatch Rutland 2022 and 2023 dental quick polls were available to complete anonymously and respondents from the 2022 poll were not directly invited to take part again. However, whilst the results are not directly comparable, a similar number of people took part in both surveys, 113 in 2022 compared to 123 in 2023.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/finding-out/health-things-you-should-know-in-pregnancy/>

As highlighted in our previous report, people cannot afford the cost of dental care. Even in an urgent or emergency situation, people report not being offered treatment under the NHS with one respondent stating; "I've had to get emergency appointments for broken/infected teeth, both times I'll said it wasn't an emergency so couldn't get an NHS appointment and had to borrow money to be able to pay for private appointments."

In our previous dentistry poll 18 respondents told us about long waits to see an NHS dentist and 14 people said their appointments had been cancelled. Within the 2023 dentistry poll 7 people commented on NHS waiting times.



"Signed up to NHS (dentist) in Oakham 18 months ago, still haven't got my appointment! My two children need a check-up but the dentist say we have to wait on the list"



In summer 2022 MyDentist, Oakham handed back their NHS contract and now undertakes only private care. More people may now be experiencing no dental care at all compared with previously or find themselves on long waiting lists for NHS dental care. After the closure of MyDentist, NHS England approached providers within Rutland with the offer for additional dental activity to replace the activity from MyDentist's terminated contract. Unfortunately, no interest was received from this process.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

The challenges of accessing NHS dentistry in Rutland appears to be affecting all age groups. We have received comments from families, young adults and retired people.<sup>8</sup> The message is clear, the people of Rutland need more affordable, accessible dentistry services. Reduced availability of good, local NHS dental services risks more severe and expensive complications for the health and wellbeing of Rutland people in the future. We will continue to press for change in this area by working with the Rutland Health and Wellbeing Board, the Integrated Care Board, East Midlands Primary Care Commissioners, Local dental Network and the MP for Rutland and Melton.

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<sup>7</sup> (Public Pack) Agenda Document for Rutland Health and Wellbeing Board, 21/03/2023 14:00 ([moderngov.co.uk](https://moderngov.co.uk))

<sup>8</sup> When speaking to people during our outreach sessions at a Parkinsons support group on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and at Oakham Library on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023.



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