

Waiting for your first appointment (paediatrics) – advice for parents and guardians

The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on the NHS ability to provide routine services. We recognise that patients are waiting longer than we would all like and it is not always easy to let patients know when they will first be seen, although the information on this platform should give you an idea.

What happens next?

You may already have a date for your child's first outpatient appointment that you will have received in the post, arranged on the telephone, or booked online. If something happens that means you are no longer able to bring them to their appointment it is very important to let us know so that we can rearrange it and offer their slot to someone else. The number for you to ring to do this will have been included in your confirmation letter.

If you do not yet have a date for their first appointment, we aim to contact you approximately 6 weeks before we are ready to see them. Most often this will be by letter, asking you to call us to book their appointment, or sometimes you will receive a telephone call direct to book their appointment.

You will be sent confirmation of your child's appointment date, time, and location by letter so that you have a written record to refer to. The appointment letter will also contain details about their specific appointment, including anything you need to bring with you, so please read it carefully, as well as any other information enclosed. Their appointment is most likely to be at the Children's Outpatient Department at Musgrove Park Hospital or at the Community Families Hub, both situated in Taunton, or at one of our community hospitals; this will be made clear on the letter.

What should I do in the meantime?

The most important thing is to keep monitoring your child's health and to get in touch with either your GP or the Children's Outpatient Department at Musgrove, if you feel their condition has deteriorated or if you have any concerns. If you are concerned or feel you need urgent help, please contact NHS 111 which can find the help you need.

Moving more National guidelines for physical activity recommend 180 minutes per day for pre-schoolers and 60 minutes per day for school age children. The following website is an excellent resource to help children of all abilities to achieve these goals: **Moving Medicine:** www.movingmedicine.ac.uk

Eating more healthily A healthy diet is important for a child's development and even more essential if they are likely to need an operation or procedure. Preventing iron deficiency can reduce the risk of requiring a blood transfusion and improve recovery after major surgery. Iron rich diets are the best way to make this happen or sometimes iron supplements are needed to top up iron levels. You can read more about the benefits of iron rich diets by searching 'NHS BT iron in your diet'. Find useful tips and ideas on eating more healthily at Change4Life: www.nhs.uk/change4life

My Planned Care Patient Information Platform

Getting control of asthma Asthma is common in childhood and if poorly controlled it can cause problems during an anaesthetic, should your child need one at any stage. An assessment of control can be done using the Asthma Control Test: www.asthmacontroltest.com If support or improvements are required, please seek advice from your GP or practice asthma nurse.

Creating a smoke free home Children who are exposed to environmental tobacco smoke are twice as likely to suffer airway or breathing problems during or after an operation, should they need one. If you or a family member would like support stopping smoking visit www.healthysomerset.co.uk/smokefree/

Keeping teeth healthy Dental decay impacts on children's wellbeing, school attendance and can increase post-operative chest infections. It's important to have your child's teeth checked once a year and brush them twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. For advice: www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/taking-care-of-childrens-teeth

Having a health check If your child is aged over 14 years and has a learning disability, they can have a free annual health check once a year at your GP surgery: www.nhs.uk/conditions/learning-disabilities/annual-health-checks

Getting the right vaccinations It's important that children and adults have vaccines at the right time for the best protection. If you or your child have missed a vaccine, contact your GP to catch up. www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/nhs-vaccinations-and-when-to-have-them

Mental wellbeing As important as physical wellbeing is it is important that to look after ours and our family's mental health. We know it can be hard waiting for care among all the demands of modern life. Remember, it's ok to not be ok, and if you or anyone in your family needs help there are a number of local and national services available. For information on our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service visit: www.somersetft.nhs.uk/camhs/

We hope that you have found this information useful. Please remember that you can also talk to PALS who provide confidential advice and support to patients, families and their carers, and can provide information on the NHS and health related matters. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is here to help when you need advice, have concerns or don't know where to turn. For queries please contact pals@somersetft.nhs.uk or telephone 01823 343536.