

## Medicines Optimisation Position Statement

Position Statement	<b>Policy statement for the treatment of dental pain and infections in primary care</b>
Position Statement number	016
Approved by Medicines Optimisation Group:	July 2023
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**Background:** Patients may present to their GP requesting treatment for dental pain and / or infections. GPs are not responsible for treating dental problems<sup>i</sup>.

**Toothache:** The NHS states that patients with toothache that lasts more than 2 days requires assessment and treatment by a dentist and patients should not go to their GP as they are not able to give dental treatment.<sup>ii</sup>

Patients should seek a dental appointment if toothache persists for more than one or two days and take pain killers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (if no contraindications) purchased from a pharmacy or supermarket until they see the dentist. <sup>iii</sup> Warn the individual not to exceed the recommended dose. Analgesics should not be used to delay appropriate dental treatment but to relieve the symptoms.

A dental abscess will not go away on its own.<sup>iv</sup> In the case of a suspected dental abscess, regular analgesia should be encouraged until a dentist can be seen. Antibiotic therapy is prescribed by a dentist to reduce the spread of infection and is **NOT** a substitute for definitive dental treatment.<sup>v</sup>

Before refusing to treat a patient asking for emergency dental treatment, the GP must ascertain that the condition requires only dental treatment. Patients presenting with signs of spreading infection or systemic involvement of a dental infection should be referred immediately to secondary care for appropriate surgical management.<sup>vi</sup>

## Summary of Prescribing Principles

- Patients with toothache that has persisted for more than a day or two, or when the pain is considered likely to be due to a dental abscess, should be advised to make a dental appointment as soon as possible.
- Patients can find dentists using NHS Choices or ICB websites or by phoning NHS111.<sup>vii</sup>
- Patients should be advised that a dental abscess won't get better on its own and requires treatment by a dentist.
- GPs may recommend painkillers while patients await dental care, but do not offer definitive treatment for dental conditions.
- Patients can purchase painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen from community pharmacies or supermarkets while awaiting dental treatment.
- Antibiotics are not routinely used to treat dental abscesses, and therefore it is not recommended that GPs prescribe antibiotics while patients await definitive treatment, unless there are signs of severe infection, with cellulitis or systemic symptoms or high risk of complications.
- Dentists are obliged to issue NHS prescriptions to NHS patients where required.
- Dentists have a duty of care to issue private prescriptions to private patients.<sup>viii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> [Patients presenting with dental problems \(bma.org.uk\)](http://bma.org.uk)

<sup>ii</sup> NHS Conditions: Toothache [Toothache - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

<sup>iii</sup> NICE.CKS - Dental Abscess. Last updated 10/18. Accessed at [LINK](#)

<sup>iv</sup> NHS Conditions: Dental abscess [Dental abscess - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

<sup>v</sup> Scottish Dental Clinical Effectiveness Programme. Drug Prescribing For Dentistry. Dental Clinical Guidance. 3rd ed. 01/16. Accessed at [LINK](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [Patients presenting with dental problems \(bma.org.uk\)](http://bma.org.uk)

<sup>vii</sup> NHS: How to find a dentist [How to find an NHS dentist - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

<sup>viii</sup> [Patients presenting with dental problems \(bma.org.uk\)](http://bma.org.uk)