



Patient update on transport to your hospital appointment

Update: 22 June 2020

North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) continues to follow government guidance to ensure that the NHS can support people who need to go to hospital.

We are providing transport, safely and swiftly during the COVID-19 pandemic, for those who need to attend appointments because of a life-threatening condition.

Patients calling 999 for an emergency ambulance will be provided with a face mask, unless this compromises their care; for example, when being given oxygen.

For non-emergency transport to hospital appointments or clinics, patients need to play their part by using their own face covering, over their mouth, nose and chin when on-board our ambulance. The hospital or clinic may also provide a face mask before you leave for your ambulance journey home.

Please do not remove it unless asked by our staff. Patients can also help by washing their hands for at least 20 second before leaving their home or hospital to get into an ambulance.

Currently, our transport services are prioritised for the following patients:

- Patients who have been discharged and need to be transported from one care setting to another, or home, if there is no alternative means of transport
- Patients suspected of having COVID-19 who need to attend ongoing care appointments and have no access to private travel.
- Patients with life-sustaining care needs who need to attend a care setting, such as for dialysis, and have no access to private travel.
- Patients defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 who need to attend ongoing care appointments and have no access to private travel.
 - High risk patients include organ transplant recipients and people with specific cancers, severe respiratory conditions, rare diseases and those on immunosuppression therapies; and women who are pregnant and have significant congenital heart disease.
 - A detailed list is available on the [gov.uk website here](#).

Patient safety and staff wellbeing

To minimise the risk of infection, staff and volunteers supporting the transport of patients with confirmed or suspected diagnosis of COVID-19 are following NHS guidance on use of personal protective equipment and decontamination of vehicles.

Non-essential persons are not able to travel with a patient. This includes family members and relatives of patients, unless they are also acting as carer. Parents or guardians must accompany children under 18.

Attending non-essential appointments

When NEAS receives a booking for patient transport, we only know the destination clinic and not the treatment the patient is receiving. This means when a patient contacts NEAS to book transport, if their clinic is not on the *essential clinic* list, we can only direct the patient back to the hospital. A list of essential treatments is listed on the [gov.uk website here](#).

The hospital is the arbitrator of a patient's need for transport as they will be aware of the patient's treatment and condition. Any patient requesting transport not going to a listed essential clinic will be referred to the hospital for their consideration as to whether transport should be provided. In these circumstances, the hospital will contact us directly.

This arrangement has been working well. We have been able to accommodate all the additional transport requests made by hospitals up to now.

Resuming transport to non-essential appointments in the future

Social distancing guidelines do not allow us to carry more than one patient on board an ambulance. This has significantly reduced the capacity we have to carry patients and means we are not able to resume all our services now.

We are working with all the hospitals and clinical commissioning groups in the North East region to plan how we can extend our services beyond the current list of prioritised patients. Please contact your clinic or hospital to discuss transport in the first instance.