



Helping us help you – using AccuRx Triage appropriately

Working Together to Keep GP Care Safe

April 2026

It has been nearly seven months since we opened our online triage system, AccuRx Triage all day, to meet the contractual requirements set by the Government. We wanted to update you on how the system is being used, its impact on our services, and explain some necessary changes.

Recently, the number of requests coming through AccuRx Triage has increased significantly. This is now affecting our ability to provide a safe, effective, and timely service to all patients.

Many of the requests we receive are:

- Not related to GP care
- For issues that can be safely managed without GP intervention
- Submitted on a Monday, when demand is at its highest

When this happens, it delays care for patients with urgent, complex, or long-term medical needs who genuinely require GP support.

The scale of demand we are managing

Between 1st January and 21st April 2026, we received 36,446 AccuRx Triage submissions, which equate to an average of 486 requests per working day.

Every triage submission:

- Is initially read and assessed by our reception team
- Is care-navigated, where appropriate, to other NHS services or members of the wider practice team
- Is reviewed and passed on to the appropriate clinician
- May be re-assessed, discussed, or redirected

Each stage of this process takes a significant amount of staff time, and many submissions require more than one assessment before a safe decision can be made. This process is vital for patient safety. However, at the current level of demand, the volume of requests means the system, at times, has become unmanageable and unsafe.

A significant number of triage requests we receive relate to conditions that are self-limiting or can be safely managed without immediate GP input, often through self-care, community pharmacy services, or alternative NHS services. When demand for GP services is saturated with these kinds of requests, it reduces our capacity to support patients with more complex, high-risk or long-term medical conditions who require timely, GP-led care.

It is essential that patients use alternative services when appropriate, to help keep GP appointments available for those who need them most.

We must also be clear that the practice operates with constrained staffing and funding arrangements. Although funding is partly linked to patient numbers, this does not provide immediate or flexible resources to increase staffing levels. As a result, the practice's capacity to deliver GP services is finite and must be managed within safe and sustainable limits.

GP appointments are limited

Each day, the practice can offer only a fixed number of GP appointments, based on the number of clinicians available and the time required for these appointments to deliver safe care. Once these appointments are filled, we are unable to create additional capacity.

If you are sent a self-booking link, please be reassured that:

- The link remains valid for 7 days
- You can revisit the link during this time to check whether capacity has become available due to cancellations

We kindly ask that you do not submit another AccuRx Triage request while you have an active booking link. The availability shown in the link is the same availability that our reception team can see. Submitting multiple requests for the same problem does not create additional appointments and may result in no response to further submissions.

Re-submitting requests increases overall demand, takes staff time away from clinical care, and compromises our ability to safely prioritise patients with urgent, complex or high-risk medical conditions. Where our team advises that another commissioned NHS service (such as a community pharmacy or extended access appointment) is more suitable for your concern, this advice is given in the interests of patient safety and effective care.

Due to limited clinical capacity, when care navigation determines that an alternative service is the most appropriate option, this decision will stand. Choosing not to follow the recommended pathway does not create additional GP appointment availability, and as a result, we may not be able to offer a GP appointment for that concern. This process is essential to protect patient safety and allow the practice to operate within safe and sustainable limits.

Using other commissioned NHS services

General Practice is only one part of the NHS. To keep patients safe and ensure GP appointments remain available for those who truly need them, we must make full use of other commissioned services, including, but not limited to:

- NHS Walk in Centre appointments
- Community pharmacies, including the Pharmacy First scheme
- The PEARS scheme for urgent eye conditions

- Extended Access Hub appointments, available in the evenings and at weekends
- Minor Injuries Units

These services are often able to provide faster access to care for many common conditions and are well equipped to manage a wide range of concerns safely and effectively. Using them when appropriate helps protect GP capacity for patients who require continuity of care or have more complex clinical needs.

To help patients access the right service the first time, we have included an easy-to-follow reference guide at the end of this document. This outlines the alternative services available and the types of conditions they are able to assess and treat.

We recognise patient frustration

We understand that delays and limitations in access can be frustrating, and that many patients would prefer to be seen at the practice for any health concern. These frustrations are shared by our staff. However, healthcare delivery is changing, and to continue providing safe and effective care, general practice and its patients must adapt and work alongside a wider range of commissioned NHS services that are now well established and appropriate for many conditions.

Our reception, clinical, and administrative teams are working above and beyond every day to deliver the highest level of care possible within our remit and available resources. Despite this, we are seeing a significant increase in rudeness and abusive behaviour towards staff. This has a serious impact on staff morale, well-being, and retention, and ultimately affects the care we are able to provide to all patients.

We ask all patients to treat our staff with kindness and respect at all times. Abuse towards staff will not be tolerated.

Same-Day Assessment Requests

Any requests that are felt to need a same-day assessment must be submitted by 10:00am. This allows sufficient time for requests to be reviewed, clinically assessed, appropriately prioritised, and safely actioned within the same day.

Requests submitted after 10:00am may still be reviewed but cannot be guaranteed a same-day response, particularly when demand is high. If your problem is not urgent, please consider submitting your AccuRx Triage request later in the week.

If demand continues at the current level, we may be forced to temporarily close the system when it is no longer safe to continue accepting requests.



Thank You for Your Patience and Understanding

We would like to sincerely thank our patients for their patience, understanding, and cooperation during what is an exceptionally challenging period for general practice. We recognise that recent changes to how care is accessed, longer waiting times, and the increased use of alternative NHS services can be frustrating and, at times, difficult to understand or accept, particularly when you may feel unwell or anxious about your health.

General practice has undergone significant and unavoidable changes in recent years, with increasing pressures, workforce limitations, and new ways of delivering care being introduced at a national level. Practices are required to adapt to these changes while continuing to prioritise patient safety, fairness, and sustainability. As a result, we must work differently and make full use of the wider range of commissioned NHS services now available to patients.

Please be assured that these decisions are never taken lightly. Every change we implement is carefully considered and is made solely to protect patient safety, ensure fair access to care, and support the wellbeing of our staff so services can continue safely in the long term. Our teams remain committed to providing the highest possible standard of care within the resources available to us.

We all share the same goal, to ensure patients receive the right care, at the right time, from the most appropriate service. By working together, showing understanding, and being open to new ways of accessing care, you play an essential role in helping us continue to deliver safe, high quality services for all our patients now and in the future.

Choosing the Right NHS Service

Using the right service helps you get care faster and keeps GP appointments available for patients who need them most.

Community Pharmacy – Pharmacy First

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/how-pharmacies-can-help/>

To help patients access the right care at the right time, many common symptoms and conditions can be safely managed by community pharmacies without the need to see a GP. Some conditions are treated under the NHS-funded Pharmacy First service, where pharmacists can assess symptoms and provide treatment where appropriate, while others can be managed with over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and advice. Most local pharmacies participate in the Pharmacy First Scheme, and no appointment is required.

They can also give advice about medicines. This includes how to use your medicine, worries about side effects or any other questions you have.

Condition	The pharmacy can help if:	GP/Urgent care needed if:
Sore throat	Age 5+, symptoms less than 10 days	Under 5, symptoms over 10 days, difficulty swallowing, very unwell
Ear infection	Age 1–17, symptoms less than 3 days	Under 1 or over 17, swelling behind ear, grommets, recurrent infections
Sinus infection	Age 12+, symptoms less than 10 days	Under 12, symptoms over 10 days, facial swelling, vision problems
Impetigo	Age 1+, small, localised sores	Under 1, blistering, widespread rash, fever
Infected insect bite	Age 1+, mild redness or infection	Under 1, fever, spreading redness, bite near eye
Shingles	Age 18+, rash started within 3 days	Under 18, face/eye rash, pregnancy, immune conditions
UTI (women)	Women aged 16–64 with typical symptoms	Under 16, over 64, men, pregnancy, fever, back pain, blood in urine

Community Pharmacy – Over the Counter

Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are treatments that can be bought directly from a pharmacy without a prescription.

Conditions / Symptoms

Colds and flu symptoms

Coughs

Hay fever and allergies

Diarrhoea

Constipation

Indigestion and heartburn

Thrush

Head lice

Minor skin rashes

Mild eczema

Insect bites and stings

Minor sprains and strains

Headaches and minor pain

Eye problems – choosing the right service

Routine optician appointment

A routine optician appointment is usually for:

- Eye tests and vision checks
- Glasses or contact lens prescriptions
- Long-standing or non-urgent eye problems

These appointments may involve private fees and are not suitable for urgent eye symptoms.

PEARS scheme (NHS urgent eye care)

The PEARS scheme is an NHS-funded service provided by specially trained community opticians. It is for urgent but non-emergency eye problems and can often offer same-day assessment. PEARS appointments are free on the NHS and help avoid unnecessary GP or hospital visits.

Not all opticians take part in the PEARS scheme. To find a PEARS optician near you:

- Ask your local optician if they provide PEARS
- Use the NHS “Find an Optician” service and check who offers urgent NHS eye care

Eye Casualty (Emergency Eye Clinic)

Eye Casualty is for serious or sight-threatening eye problems only, such as:

- Sudden loss of vision
- Severe eye pain
- Serious eye injury or trauma
- Chemical splashes to the eye

Website: <https://www.sth.nhs.uk/sheffield-urgent-care/eye-emergencies/>

Call on: 0114 271 2726

Opening hours: 8:00am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday (*Closed weekends and bank holidays*)

Address: Emergency Eye Clinic, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2JF

Who can use this service: Adults aged 16 and over with serious or sight-threatening eye conditions. This service is not suitable for minor or non-urgent eye problems.

Important: Children under 16 who need emergency eye care should attend the Sheffield Children’s Hospital Emergency Department.

Eye problem	Use PEARS scheme (NHS urgent eye care) if:	Go to Eye Casualty/A&E if:
Red or itchy eye	You are aged 4 or over and symptoms are mild, such as slight redness, itchiness, or irritation	The child is under 4, there is severe pain, light sensitivity, or changes in vision
Eye pain	Pain is mild or uncomfortable, rather than severe, and no other worrying symptoms	Pain is severe, getting worse, or there is a swollen eyelid with fever
Something in the eye	Feels like dust, grit, sand, or an eyelash and vision is normal	Chemical splash, a deep or embedded object, or loss or blurring of vision
Flashes or floaters	New flashes or floaters but vision is otherwise normal and no other symptoms	Sudden loss of vision, a curtain-like shadow, or flashes with headache or neurological symptoms
Dry or watery eyes	Symptoms are mild, recent, and improving	Symptoms are severe, long-lasting, or affecting daily activities
Contact lens problems	Mild redness or irritation only, no pain	Painful red eye, concern about an ulcer, or problems after sleeping in contact lenses

Important: If you have sudden vision loss, severe eye pain, a serious injury, or are worried about your eyesight, do not delay — attend Eye Casualty, A&E, or call 999.

Dental Problems – Visit your Dentist or call 111 if you do not have one

Use your dentist if you have:	Go to A&E if:
Toothache or sensitivity	Facial swelling spreading to eye or neck
Broken tooth or filling	Difficulty breathing
Lost crown or cap	Difficulty swallowing saliva
Gum swelling or bleeding	Heavy bleeding
Mouth ulcers over 2 weeks	Severe trauma
Pain when chewing	Signs of sepsis (fever, confusion, very unwell)
Wisdom tooth pain	
Broken dentures	

Pregnancy – Self-Refer to Midwife here: <https://www.jessopwingmaternity.sth.nhs.uk/self-referral.php>

When to self-refer:	Contact GP or urgent care if:
Positive pregnancy test	Pain with bleeding
Booking first midwife appointment	Severe sickness (unable to keep fluids down)
	Severe abdominal pain
<p>You can self-refer to the Termination of Pregnancy Service through G1 by telephone on 0114 226 8225 and selecting Option 1. This service is confidential but if you are under 16 you will need to bring an adult (someone over 18) who you trust when you go for your appointment.</p> <p>You can also arrange a termination through the MSI Reproductive Choices service. To book an appointment through the One Call Booking system telephone 0345 300 8090 or use the online booking or web chat support at www.msichoices.org.uk</p>	

Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) – Over 16s only

Website: <https://www.sth.nhs.uk/sheffield-urgent-care/minor-injuries-unit-hallamshire-hospital/>

Call on: 0114 271 2071

Opening hours: 8am – 8pm, 7 days a week

Address: Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Entrance 12, Broomhall, Sheffield S10 2TA

Who can use this service: Adults aged 16 and over. You can attend directly without needing to see a GP (appointment not required).

Minor injury unit can help with:	999/A&E required for:
Sprains and strains	Chest pain
Minor fractures (not hip/thigh)	Breathing difficulties
Small wounds needing stitches or glue	Heavy bleeding
Minor burns or scalds	Loss of consciousness
Insect bites	Major trauma
Minor head injuries (no blackout)	Severe allergic reaction
Splinters or small objects in the skin	Stroke-like symptoms

Sexual Health Sheffield

Website: <https://www.sexualhealthsheffield.nhs.uk/>

Call on: 0114 226 8888

Address: Sexual Health Sheffield, Entrance 11a, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Glossop Road, Sheffield S10 2JF

Who can use this service: People of all ages registered with a Sheffield GP. You can self-refer directly to this service without needing to see a GP.

Sexual Health Sheffield can help with:	Urgent GP / A&E needed if:
STI testing and treatment	Severe abdominal or pelvic pain
Emergency contraception	Fever with pelvic pain
Routine sexual health checks	Heavy bleeding
Genital symptoms (lumps, discharge)	Sexual assault (<i>must be escalated immediately</i>)
Concerns about STI exposure	

If you are considering a vasectomy, you do not need to see your GP for a referral. Patients registered with a Sheffield GP practice can self-refer directly to Marie Stopes International (MSI). You can do this by contacting MSI Direct on 0345 300 021, where they will provide information about eligibility, the procedure, and appointment availability.

Sheffield Talking Therapies (NHS) – Adults 18+

Website: <https://www.sheffieldtalkingtherapies.nhs.uk/>

Call on: 0114 226 4380

Who can use this service: Adults aged 18+ who live in Sheffield or are registered with a Sheffield GP. You can self-refer directly to this service without needing to see a GP.

Sheffield Talking Therapies can help with:	Contact your GP/urgent services if:
Stress, anxiety, or worry	You are unsure which service is right for you
Low mood or depression	Your symptoms are rapidly worsening
Feeling overwhelmed or struggling to cope	You think you may have bipolar disorder, psychosis, or an eating disorder
Mental health difficulties linked to a long-term physical condition	You are self-harming or feel unable to keep yourself safe
One-to-one talking therapy	
Group courses or online therapy programmes	
Mild to moderate mental health concerns	Mental health crisis: contact urgent services, A&E, or 999

Important: If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, a mental health crisis, or feel in immediate danger, please seek urgent help via NHS urgent mental health services, A&E, or 999.
