

NHS industrial action in Greater Manchester

Issue 11

NHS Industrial action in December 2023 and January 2024:

- There will be a full walkout by junior doctors for three days from 7am on 20th December to 7am on 23rd December 2023.
- This is then followed by a six-day full walkout by junior doctors from 7am on 3rd January to 7am on 9th January 2024.

Junior doctors are qualified doctors in clinical training and covers everyone from those who have recently graduated from medical school through to those with many years' experience. See the British Medical Association [website](#) for more information.

In hospitals, consultant cover will be in place during this time to maintain safe patient care, along with the normal number of nurses and allied health professionals, but the strikes will affect some operations, appointments, and clinics.

The impact is likely to be very challenging for local services, with Christmas and New Year a usual time of high-pressure across health and care, and many staff are on pre-arranged annual leave. We are expecting a challenging few days, with extended waits in our emergency departments. It may take longer than expected to be seen and treated for those patients who attend emergency departments, but do not have time-critical or life-threatening conditions.

How have we been planning for industrial action?

We have been managing the continued impact of strikes across the NHS for over a year now. The NHS in Greater Manchester has tried and tested plans in place to mitigate risks to patient safety and manage disruption due to industrial action.

We are working closely with our union colleagues to put in place robust plans to ensure continued provision of key services. There are no derogations in place with the exception being arrangements to recall staff in event of a mass casualty incident.

Our emergency, urgent care and maternity services will be available for patients who need them. We are prioritising resources to protect emergency treatment, critical care, neonatal care, maternity, and trauma, and ensure we prioritise patients who have waited the longest for urgent elective care and some cancer surgery.

Hospital trusts will continue to do everything it can to go ahead with planned procedures – especially for patients in greatest clinical need – and will contact patients if an appointment needs to be rescheduled. Patients should attend their appointment as planned if they have not been contacted.

GP practices will be open during the junior doctors' strike, but some will be more affected as they are training practices. Patients can contact their GP in the usual way

and should attend all appointments unless they hear directly from the practice not to attend. Patients should also attend all dental appointments unless they hear otherwise.

We are working together with our local authority and voluntary sector partners to get people out of hospital as soon as is appropriate. Intensive work has taken place to support people into long-term placements ahead of the Christmas period. Discharge coordinators are in place to help people returning to their own homes.

We share information and advice with system partners to support public communications, and help reassure the public, as well as sign post people to services.

Important information:

- Outpatients and people coming to hospital for an operation or surgery should assume that unless they hear otherwise, scheduled appointments will go ahead as planned. However, some appointments and operations will be affected by the strike action. If this is the case, patients will hear from their hospital directly by letter, telephone, or text message if they need to cancel or reschedule their appointment.
- People do not need to contact their NHS service or team in advance, the team will contact patients directly if an appointment needs to be rescheduled.
- Local NHS services will be using their website and social media channels to provide up to date information to the public about local service disruption.
- People can support the NHS during the strike days by using the right health service to meet their needs. The NHS is asking patients to choose services appropriately during industrial action and take simple steps to help ensure care is available to patients who need it most. This includes using 111 online as the first port of call for health needs, and only using 999 if it is a life-threatening emergency.
- The NHS is also asking the public to play their part by taking simple steps during industrial action to look after themselves, loved ones and checking in on vulnerable family members and neighbours. Where possible, we advise people to have a well-stocked medicine cabinet, a first aid kit, and to order repeat prescriptions in good time, and ahead of travelling.
- To ensure we can free up beds for sick patients who are coming into our emergency departments, we ask anyone who has a loved one in hospital who is ready to come home, to come and collect them as soon as possible. The public can provide help to family and friends through assisting with transport and lifts, food shopping, supporting with meals and laundry, and being nearby should some additional help be needed.

Where to get help from? Get to know where to go:

Regardless of any strike action taking place, it is important that people who need urgent medical care continue to come forward as normal, especially in emergency and life-threatening cases - when someone is seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk.

The message from the NHS in Greater Manchester for patients who need medical treatment during the strikes, is that urgent and emergency care will be there for you but please choose the right service for your needs. **Get to know where to go:** [Get to know where to go | Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership \(gmintegratedcare.org.uk\)](https://gmintegratedcare.org.uk).

You can download social media assets to use on your own accounts and channels via Google Drive [here](#) or our website [here](#). These include resources signposting to services, social media graphics along with accompanying messages, visuals for waiting room display screens and an advert you can print or use in your external communication channels.

If you have access to a messaging service that can directly reach patients such as a GP text messaging service, please consider sharing useful advice and links through this platform.

NHS 111:

NHS Greater Manchester is urging members of the public to use [NHS 111 Online](#) for all non-emergency healthcare needs, in the first instance, unless the issue concerns a child under 5, when they should call 111. Deaf people or people with hearing loss can dial 18001 111 on a textphone or use the Relay UK app (which can be downloaded from Apple's App Store or Google Play Store).

[NHS 111 Online](#) can help if:

- You need help but don't know who to call,
- How to find general health information and advice,
- You are ill and need to be told what to do next.

Pharmacy:

Lots of illnesses can also be managed safely at home, or with a trip to a local pharmacist. There are pharmacies open late in to the night and very early in the morning. Find your nearest one here: [Find a pharmacy - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk).

Urgent dental care:

The Greater Manchester Urgent Dental Care Service is available from 8am to 10pm every day including weekends and Bank Holidays for severe dental pain and infection. People can call **0333 332 3800** to be assessed by a healthcare professional, who can provide self-care advice or book a face-to-face appointment, if needed.

Urgent eye care:

Free urgent eyecare is available across all 10 areas of Greater Manchester. If you have a sudden and urgent problem with your eyes, you can contact a local practice to get an appointment: [NHS Greater Manchester Community Urgent Eye Care Service \(CUES\) - Primary Eyecare Services](#).

Mental health:

For free urgent mental health support, people can contact one of these 24/7 helplines – they're available to anyone of any age:

- Bolton, Manchester, Salford, Trafford, and Wigan 0800 953 0285 (freephone).
- Bury, Heywood, Middleton & Rochdale, Oldham, Stockport, and Tameside 0800 014 9995 (freephone).

If there's an immediate risk of danger to life, you should ring 999.

Important information if travelling to other parts of the country:

If you need a GP appointment, please call your surgery back home where you are registered. Your own surgery is used to helping by phone, video, and email. And if you need a prescription, they can send it to any pharmacy you choose.

Make sure you have enough of your prescribed medications. You can easily order repeat prescriptions via the NHS App, through your GP practice website or, if you do not have access to GP online services, by calling your GP practice.

Further information:

- NHS pay is a matter for the Government and trade unions.
- NHS Greater Manchester has a dedicated industrial action webpage here: [Information for the public on industrial action \(strikes\) | Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership \(gmintegratedcare.org.uk\)](#).
- Information from NHS England can be found here: [NHS England » Information for the public on industrial action](#).
- Data on the impact of industrial action can be found here: [NHS England » Potential industrial action in the NHS](#).
- [While You Wait](#) has information for people waiting for planned hospital treatment including for staff. People can find advice on how to manage their physical and mental health while they wait.
- Please follow [@NHS_GM](#) on X and local hospital trusts for any local updates and help share our updates.

Contact:

For further information, please contact a member of NHS Greater Manchester's communications team: gmhscp.media@nhs.net. Please note, we now have a formal on call arrangement for communications support and media queries out-of-hours. You can get in touch with the team on this email.