

GP collective action – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is GP collective action?

The British Medical Association (BMA) has announced that GPs will take collective action should their ballot outcome support this course of action. This means that GPs may choose to make changes to some aspects of how they work. This is different to a strike, as practices will not close, but it may limit the availability of certain services which do not form part of the current core contract.

Practices will still be open and will still see patients. However, some GPs may operate differently. Where this happens, patients may be directed to other local services to make sure that safe provision of care remains.

This is a non-statutory ballot for collective action, which means GPs should not be taking any action that would breach their contract.

I thought GPs were the NHS?

GPs are independent contractors who are contracted to provide NHS services. During collective action, GPs will still be working and will still be providing the NHS services that they are contracted to provide.

What is the impact of collective action?

During collective action practices are still required to fulfil their contracts. This essentially means:

- Practices are required to be open between 0800 and 1830 – Monday to Friday.
- Practices should provide reasonable care to patients this includes:
 - Making appointments available
 - Providing advice or care to patients by another means
 - Give advice on alternative services
 - Providing access to prescriptions, long terms condition management, vaccinations, diagnoses and referral (including where clinically urgent)
- Practices also need to take into account:
 - The needs of a patient to avoid risks to patient safety
 - The benefits to patients of providing continuity of care.

The NHS is working hard to plan for disruption and to mitigate this where possible. GPs are choosing to take this action but the nature of the collective action means that the impacts will vary at different GP practices and area by area. We anticipate that this action will cause disruption across the NHS as patients may need to attend other services, this could mean appointments for some services not being at your usual GP practice and instead being somewhere else.

When is this happening?

The nature of collective action means that it does not need a formal notice period, the BMA has indicated that this could mean action starting on 1 August 2024. As the action does not involve a breach of contract and practices will remain open, it could potentially continue for an unspecified but potentially significant period of time.

Is this safe?

Patient safety is a priority and the usual rules and considerations around safety continue to apply. GPs should not take any action that puts patient safety at risk.

Can I still get an appointment at my GP?

Yes, practices will still be open and you can book appointments through your practice. If you have an appointment, you should attend unless your GP practice tell you otherwise. Your GP practice should inform you of any changes to services.

What is NHS England doing about this?

The NHS and government is working hard to avert collective action and to plan for disruption and to mitigate this where possible. The nature of the collective action means that the impacts will vary at different GP practices. NHS England is working closely with government to review options for providing additional funding to further support general practice, subject to funding availability constraints.