

# Patient Transport

## Frequently Asked Questions

---

### 1. What help is available for me to get to hospital appointments?

---

Patients are encouraged to make their own way to NHS appointments wherever possible. If they are too unwell to travel by car, taxi, public transport or community transport, they can contact the relevant service (see section 3) to be assessed to see if there are eligible for **Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPTS)**.

---

### 2. What is Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPTS)?

---

#### 2.1 What is non- emergency patient transport (NEPTS)?

It is a transport service for patients who currently can't travel safely any other way to NHS secondary-care appointments, admissions or discharges. Journeys to GPs, dentists or opticians or their practice staff are not included. NEPTS vehicles deliver pre-planned journeys e.g. outpatient appointments, and non-urgent on the day journeys e.g. discharges not planned in advance, where there are clinical reasons the patient can't travel by everyday means.

#### 2.2 What training do NEPTS staff have?

NEPTS staff are known as Ambulance Care Assistants (ACAs). ACAs are trained in basic manual handling and also trained in basic lifesaving. They are trained to use all of the equipment that is carried on a NEPTS ambulance.

#### 2.3 Who pays for NEPTS?

The local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group pays for this transport for any patient registered with a local GP who is eligible for NEPTS transport

#### 2.4 Who provides the NEPTS Service in Devon?

NEPTS in Devon is provided mainly by three transport providers:

**First Care Ambulance (FCA)** provides journeys for patients who live in Devon and are registered with Northern, Eastern and Western Devon CCG GP practices

**ERS Medical** provides all journeys for Plymouth residents and those to any service in Plymouth or provided by Derriford hospital staff.

**Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust Patient Transport Service** provides journeys for patients registered with South Devon and Torbay CCG GP practices and within the South Devon area.

These providers have contracts to move all eligible patients to any NHS secondary care venue required. Each provider has a contract which specifies exactly what is included over what hours. All patients are covered by one of the providers.

Additionally in Devon and Plymouth, other local providers are contracted to provide other appropriate journeys and booked by the central booking service.

### **2.5 Do patients have to pay for NEPTS?**

Patients that are eligible will not need to pay for transport.

---

## **3. Making a booking**

---

**3.1** Assessments of eligibility, booking of transport and to discuss alternative options, please call the following number for your area:

**Devon (Including Exeter) - Patient Transport Advice Service 0345 155 1009**

**Plymouth 01752 431954**

**Torbay, Teignbridge and South Devon - Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust:  
01830 656777**

### **3.3 When should I book?**

You are required to book 2 weeks to 48 hours ahead of your appointment. Please make sure to update your booking if your appointment changes.

Offices are open business hours and so please bare this in mind when booking transport. They are not open weekends or bank holidays.

Booking requests received with less than 48 hours' notice will, in most cases, be unable to be accommodated.

### **3.4 Can I book NEPTS to go to my GP appointment?**

No. The national regulations do not allow non-emergency patient transport services to take patients to primary care i.e. GP, dentist, optician or pharmacist or any appointment provided by the practice staff.

### **3.5 Do they go everywhere NHS appointments are held?**

NEPTS can go to any other secondary-care service funded by the NHS, whatever premises are being used.

### **3.6 Can I bring a family escort with me?**

A patient can bring an escort with them on NEPTS in limited circumstances – if the patient is a child under 16, or with confirmation from a clinician that this is necessary. Circumstances

could include that the patient has dementia, needs reassurance or needs an interpreter. An escort on a vehicle needs to be fulfilling a role on the vehicle to travel on the vehicle.

Otherwise friends and relatives can arrange to meet the patient at hospital to give them support during treatment or appointments.

### **3.7 Can I ask for a female only or male only crew?**

In some clinical circumstances, where this is warranted, this may be possible. Advance planning will be needed so bookings must be made at least 48 hours ahead and you will have to provide information to support the request. If clinical staff who understand your reasons are available, it will be helpful for them to assist you when you book.

### **3.8 Can my doctor get me a booking for NEPTS?**

Clinical Staff are not expected to book transport for patients unless in an emergency or urgent clinical circumstances.

Patients, their relatives, family, friends or carers are asked to make their own bookings for out-patient appointments or admissions. Staff at hospitals will help with booking transport at discharge from hospital.

### **3.9 Will all patients be able to insist on travelling alone, and not share with other patients?**

No. NEPTS vehicles are designed to carry more than one patient at a time. However, in very limited circumstances, it may be clinically appropriate for a patient to travel alone. These circumstances would include, but not be limited to, having an infectious condition or having MRSA in an open area or wound or where it would be unsafe in another way for a patient to share with others.

Patients who want to travel alone will be advised to make their own arrangements.

### **3.10 Can patients book NEPTS if they can't afford to pay for another option?**

No, patient transport is only available to those for whom it would not be safe or clinically suitable to travel by private or public transport. It is not about affordability. Patients should plan ahead to book and afford transport, be supported by providers to reclaim their costs if eligible or ask providers for advance costs help to attend.

See Q8 "how to reclaim patient travel costs".

### **3.11 How do patients get home, if they came in to hospital with an emergency ambulance?**

It is the patient's responsibility to ask family or friends to collect them. If they are assessed by hospital staff as being eligible for NEPTS, discharge staff should follow their organisation instructions for booking NEPTS.

---

## **4. Who can have NEPTS?**

---

#### **4.1 Who can have NEPTS?**

Patients are eligible when they meet the clinical criteria for help at the time of booking and journey. This does not include social or financial reasons for transport (such as being unable to afford a journey or not having access to a bus or car).

#### **4.2 What are the criteria?**

The criteria used to assess eligibility is available via our website at:  
<http://www.southdevonandtorbayccg.nhs.uk/your-health/Documents/policy-eligibility-for-patient-transport.pdf>

#### **4.3 Who will decide who gets NEPTS? Are they clinically trained to decide?**

Staff at the 3 booking services in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay and South Devon will make the assessments, using the same criteria each time. These staff will use a standard protocol to check the patient's needs, whether they can safely use other forms of transport and any immediate circumstances which have to be taken into account. They do not base their decisions on a given diagnosis but on a patient's need for support and access to help.

#### **4.4 If I have been assessed once, will I always be eligible?**

No, each time a patient makes a booking their eligibility will be reassessed to take into account changing circumstances and clinical needs.

#### **4.5 If a patient lives in a nursing home, will they get NEPTS?**

Some homes have their own transport and can transport their residents themselves. Otherwise any patient or care home staff will need to contact PTAS to see if they are eligible for NEPTS, or make other arrangements.

Care homes should not ask the patient's GP surgery to book transport on their behalf.

#### **4.6 Will patients receiving CHC funding always get NEPTS?**

No, they will be assessed when they request a booking.

#### **4.7 Will a patient who is in "hospital at home" always need NEPTS?**

No, they will be assessed in the same way as other bookings for medical need.

---

### **5. Additional help for frequent attenders**

---

#### **5.1 What is a frequent attender?**

Any patient who has to attend hospital at least 3 times a week or ten times a month for treatment for the same medical condition.

#### **5.2 Why do they get extra help?**

They are offered an extra service provided locally which recognises that quite often the treatment and the repetitive nature of the treatment they are receiving means patients can feel very unwell and significantly less able to travel by other means.

### **5.3 Can they choose to travel independently?**

Yes, it will be up to them to decide if they wish to use NHS provided transport or to travel independently.

### **5.4 Who books their journeys?**

Staff at the treatment unit where patients are attending will deal with bookings and amendments for regular journeys. Where additional journeys to other linked services are needed, patients in Devon can book directly by ringing the PTAS on 0345 155 1009,

in Plymouth ring 01752 431954

or in Torbay and south Devon ring 01803 656 777

### **5.5 Is it the same service?**

No, this service is not provided by a NEPTS company. It will be a car service from an approved local provider where the driver will collect them, and possibly other patients (solo journeys are not routinely provided), take them to hospital and collect them after the appointment for the return journey. All bookings by staff or patients are made through PTAS.

### **5.6 If I am too unwell to travel by car, what happens?**

Tell staff at your treatment unit and they can book non-emergency patient transport if you now need more support than a car driver can provide.

---

## **6. Problems and changes**

---

### **6.1 How will the patient at home know that transport is running late?**

Your transport provider will be responsible for keeping patients and/or hospital departments informed if they are running late.

### **6.2 How do patients notify the transport if they don't want to travel?**

As far in advance as possible patients should contact their booking service to cancel the journey. Even if you make this decision on the day, it is useful to let the booking service know, as your transport may then be used on another journey instead.

### **6.3 What happens if I'm not ready when the transport arrives to collect me?**

At home:

Because there may be other patients being collected on the way, patients are generally asked to be ready at home to be picked up 2 hours before their appointment time. Should a

patient not be ready when a vehicle arrives, the crew/driver will have to decide how long they can wait without compromising the arrangements for other patients. If the crew have to move on there is no guaranteed return to pick the patient up later.

After your appointment or treatment:

Your return journey will have been booked for a set time. If you are held up and not ready when your transport arrives, they are able to wait for a short period. If the transport cannot wait until you are ready, a new booking will be made. You may then have to wait some time for your journey home.

#### **6.4 How do I make changes to bookings?**

Patients can ring the booking service to update them on any changes to their plans.

#### **6.5 Do patients get told what service has been booked for them?**

Most patients will be booked with the local main service provider, as long as they make their booking in advance.

#### **6.7 What type of vehicle will be provided?**

The main providers will mainly be using minibus type vehicles, with a number of seats, clamp points for wheelchairs and stretcher use capability. You may share with a number of other patients.

#### **6.8 How do patients raise concerns or complaints?**

They can report concerns to the booking service they used, to the transport provider booked for them or to the patient experience or patient advice service at the CCG. Issues can be raised in any format, writing down the details is not a requirement, but if possible you should provide details of what happened, what you are unhappy about and what response you want. All agencies will cooperate in providing explanations and learning from issues raised.

#### **6.9 How can patients give positive or negative feedback?**

You can thank staff directly, complete feedback forms on vehicles or let any local PALS service know.

---

## **7. Long distance journeys**

---

### **7.1 What if I am travelling to another county/area outside Devon?**

As long as you are eligible and travelling to an NHS appointment or service, you can book NEPTS.

### **7.2 What does in area mean?**

In area means that the start and destination points of a journey are within a 40 mile radius of the centre of Devon. This covers Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, and Taunton.

### 7.3 What does out of area mean?

Out of area means that either or both the start and destination points of a journey are outside a 40 mile radius of the centre of Devon.

### 7.4 Are the bookings made in the same way?

Yes, by contacting the relevant contact centre in section 3. .

### 7.5 Why do patients and staff have to give notice of journeys needed out of area?

Taking a vehicle out of the area for a significant period of time means that the resources need careful planning for that day. Notice of the journey allows the provider that planning time.

### 7.6 Will a journey still be free to the patient?

Yes as long as the patient is eligible.

### 7.7 What service will this be booked with?

These journeys are not included in the main contracts for NEPTS transport providers, and may be booked with a range of local approved providers. If returning from out of area, the journey may be arranged with a service from another area of the country.

---

## 8. How do patients get help with travel costs to attend NHS appointments?

---

**Most patients** make their own way to NHS appointments, or home from hospital. They have to make the payment for this transport themselves.

**Some patients** are eligible to reclaim their costs for attending NHS appointment.

**No costs are refundable** for attending an appointment with your GP, dentist, optician or any of their practice staff.

**Full costs** are only refunded if you have chosen to use the cheapest suitable option available.

**To reclaim:** Some large venues and hospitals where NHS appointments are held will be able to refund the costs to eligible patients on the day of an appointment. To apply you need to have proof you are eligible and proof of your costs with you. If this is not possible they will be able to provide patients with reclaim forms which can be used to reclaim up to 3 months after the appointment.

For all information or to request a form ring call **0300 330 1343** or go to

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/help-with-health-costs.aspx>

Also look out for local posters “Help with Health Costs” or ask at any patient advice or general office.

Further information, advice and support can be obtained by contacting the relevant patient experience or patient advice team:

For Northern, Eastern and Western Devon (Including Exeter and Plymouth) call 0300 123 1672 or email [pals.devon@nhs.net](mailto:pals.devon@nhs.net)

For South Devon and Torbay call 01803 652 578 or email [patientfeedback.sdtccg@nhs.net](mailto:patientfeedback.sdtccg@nhs.net)

**Please note that these teams cannot book transport and cannot change or overturn eligibility decisions.**