



mereside medical
Your local practice

Guidance for patients on accessing your General Practice services

October 2023

We are aware that some of our patients have expressed concerns recently around booking or accessing care at times when we may need to switch AskMyGP off. We thought it would be helpful to provide some explanation for this approach.

We would like to reassure all of our patients that we are contactable over the phone and at the front reception desk throughout our opening hours. Our friendly patient services team are available to take calls between 8.30am – 6pm at all of our practices. They will then add requests to AskMyGP on the patient's behalf if AMGP has been switched off.

Requests for care that are added to the system are assessed on the same day by a senior clinician. They are dealt with in order of clinical priority. Usually, patients will be consulted on the same day. If the request is for routine or non-urgent care, or if the patient prefers to wait for their preferred clinician, the consultation may be booked for a later date. This will typically be within a few days. Consultations may be by email, over the phone, or face to face, as is clinically appropriate and preferred by the patient.

Please bear in mind that, after assessment by our team, it may be entirely clinically appropriate for patients to be advised to approach other healthcare providers. Examples include NHS 111, the Minor Injuries Unit at Princess of Wales Hospital, Community Pharmacy, etc.

There have been many reports in the news over the past couple of years that patient demand for General Practice services has been significantly and consistently higher than pre-covid levels. This is a national trend as well as one seen across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. We have also seen this pattern at all three Mereside Medical practices (Staploe, Cathedral, and Haddenham).

As a result of this, the British Medical Association has issued guidance on safe levels of working in General Practice (see <https://tinyurl.com/bdchfv7>). While we are not statutorily obliged to follow this national guidance, we must consider it seriously to ensure that we offer a safe, effective service for all of our patients and all of our clinicians. This includes our GPs but also applies to the large and diverse team that we are now proud to offer to our patients, including:

- Advanced Nurse Practitioners
- Advanced Paramedic Practitioners
- Specialist Nurses
- Physiotherapists
- Practice Nurses and Healthcare Assistants
- Health & Well-being coaches
- Clinical Pharmacists
- Pharmacy Technicians
- Medicines Technicians
- Social Prescribing Link Workers, and more



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Nevertheless, and despite us having diversified and grown our team over the past three years, the volume of patient demand can still sometimes outstrip the capacity that our funding provides for. Inevitably sometimes there will also be staff sickness or emergency leave. The consequence of this is that we may sometimes have to turn AskMyGP off before the end of the day. However, during our opening hours patients can always contact the practice and ask that their care need is assessed by a clinician. A clinically appropriate plan will be formulated from there.

In these difficult times, we are very proud of our record on patient access. Our teams are always happy to help, so we would encourage any patient who is concerned or experiencing difficulty accessing care to contact us. The Patient Services team will offer advice and support on how we can make sure that you get the care that you need.

We always welcome feedback from patients on how we can improve. You can provide this on our website (<https://www.meresidemedical.nhs.uk/patient-feedback/>), over the phone, in person, using the paper forms we have in the practice, or by emailing cpicb.mereside-pm@nhs.net.

We would also like to make all patients aware of our excellent results in the annual GP survey (<https://tinyurl.com/24bmaczf>). You will see that Mereside Medical Practices have exceeded regional (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough ICS) and national scores in all but one metric.

In these challenging times we are delighted with these results and hopefully show that the broader experience of and our service is very positive.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our patients for their compassion and understanding as we continue to offer the very best service we can.

Thank you.