

## Public experience of blood tests during the coronavirus pandemic



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## Share your health and care experience

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent acts as the voice of the public for health and social care services in the City. We collect feedback from the public using health and care services and use that feedback to work with service providers and service commissioners to improve services.

Please contact us if you have an experience or opinion you would like to share. The best way to share an experience about a service is to visit our online Feedback Centre.

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**What you're saying** *quality public*  
*helping A&E ease support doctors*  
*friendly waiting health long-term*  
*improvements good Happy patient*

## Recommendations

- Identify why patients are having to wait so long for their phone calls to book a blood test to be answered and deal with the cause so that patient calls are answered within 10 minutes (NHS England, 2018).
- Ensure all staff wear PPE and comply with work regulations 1992 (GOV.UK, 2020).
- Publish regular updates on online platforms during busy periods, to reassure patients that they have the most up to date contact details and information. Also, reiterate that patients are expected to face longer wait times than usual and provide a rationale for the delay to ease patient concerns (Health Care Professional, 2020).

We will follow-up action and progress made on our recommendation 1 month following publication of this report.

## Background

There are 21 Phlebotomy Centres across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire; 14 are in Stoke-on-Trent:

- Bentilee Health Centre
- Cobridge Community Health Centre
- Meir Primary Care Centre
- Tunstall Health Centre
- Stoke Health Centre
- Kidsgrove Health Centre
- Blurton Health Centre
- Burslem Health Centre
- Fenton Health Centre
- Hanley Health Centre
- Longton Cottage Hospital
- Longton Health Centre
- Shelton Primary Care Centre
- Smallthorne Health Centre
- Children under 10 are seen at the Paediatric Clinic at Royal Stoke University Hospital

## What We Did

We started to receive a high volume of feedback about blood tests from 6 July 2020. It was evident that people were experiencing difficulties in accessing blood tests and therefore we organised a call-out for feedback about the public's experience of blood tests during the coronavirus pandemic. This was promoted on our social media platforms from 21 July 2020 to 10 August 2020.

**‘Have you had a blood test? If so, we would love to hear about your experience. All comments will be anonymised’**

## Engagement

Method	Number of feedback items received
Feedback centre	2
Telephone	2
Facebook	63
Email	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>76</b>

## University Hospital of North Midlands (UHNM)

On 29 July UHNM published details of a new UHNM Phlebotomy online booking system. They have developed a web-based booking system for patients needing to book a blood test in the community. Prior to coronavirus, a walk-in service was available at venues in the community, but patients are now required to book in advance to support social distancing. The online booking service allows patients to book an appointment much quicker and will provide a text confirmation of date / time / venue. (website included) <http://www.uhnm.nhs.uk/our-services/blood-tests/?fbclid=IwAR2K-hKgrfkfHs5lzlhPhKJ-DmqXaAbocVJNtosoe62PscFJTU3QsM0LkIs>

The existing appointment line number 01782 674242 will be retained for those patients who do not have internet or mobile phone access; phone line operators will be able to book appointments on the electronic system on behalf of these patients.

**In six weeks from the 10 August 2020 Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent will complete a further call out for evidence on the 21 September to gather feedback about the Phlebotomy online booking system which has been implemented.**

## Appendix 1

### Feedback Received

#### Negative telephone waiting times

1. Received the following message on the website feedback centre:  
- Tried to phone no one to speak to left lots of messages nobody got back or sent another appointment as I could not make the original totally ignored from 29th June 2020. I cannot go on phoning in vain.
2. A lady rang the office phone and informed LJ that she is having difficulty booking a blood test on the number provided.
3. Tried for 4 days to get an appointment by calling.....it was ridiculous.
4. I rang for two days to book for a blood test no answer, in the end the nurse at my doctor's did it.
5. lady has been trying to ring for a blood test since the start of the week (3 days). phone is constantly engaged. Told her that was the only official number we had but gave her the direct number for Cobridge Health Centre to see if they might be able to get through on her behalf.
6. Received the following comment on our website:  
- MY BROTHER IN LAW 84 HS BEEN TRYING FOR 2 DAYS ALL DAY, THEN GETS CUT OFF HE AS GIVEN UP, SO FRUSTRATED.
7. Received the following feedback on info@  
I had to book a blood test on July 20th. The first one available was August 3rd. I need regular blood tests for chemotherapy, but I have to book them weeks in advance. The whole service is not fit for purpose.
8. It took me three weeks to get an appointment every time I rang it did not say wait in a queue. It was just not available, it cost my next-door neighbour £20 in calls before he got through.
9. I tried repeatedly to phone to book a blood test and, in the end, I gave up. Even ripped my blood test form up.
10. Well my mum had to get blood taken she has cancer and getting an appointment we gave up and ended up where we had to take her in her condition up to the cancer ward I was not impressed with the service at all

11. Started to call for a blood test on Monday 9am and it was not until Friday morning we got through.
12. Blood test- They never answer the phone!

### **Positive telephone waiting times**

13. I have been for a blood test at Bradwell Hospital it took a while to get through using the phone number but after several time I managed to get an appointment.
14. I booked over the phone.  
  
I was given a date and time and asked to arrive just a few minutes before hand. I waited in a waiting room with a mask on at least 2.5mts away from anyone. Called in on time. Bloods taken. Sorted.
15. Received the following on info@ I booked over the telephone for a blood test, very easily. No waiting around as everyone has a particular time and you can only go in 2/3 minutes before your allotted slot Getting a dental appointment for toothache, well now that is a whole other ballgame...nightmare!

### **Positive Phlebotomy Centres**

16. have recently been for a blood test at Bradwell Hospital and the service I received was fantastic there was only 3 of us there waiting and we were at a safe distance from one another.
17. I have recently been for a blood test at Bradwell Hospital and the service I received was fantastic there was only 3 of us there waiting and we were at a safe distance from one another.
18. I rang the blood test phone number and I was on hold for 20 minutes then I gave them where I wanted to go for a blood test and then they gave me a date and time. When I arrived at Cobridge Health centre you have to wear a face mask and you go to the main doors where a person is there and you give them your name and then they tell you go and sit down in the reception area. Sitting area is 2 metres apart and then you go straight in.
19. My blood test was okay at Roya Stoke Hospital, but I had to wait for an hour or more for the results of the blood test.

20. My experience was great at Cobridge health centre with one exception! Waiting outside I felt vulnerable due to “local” activity’s going on. Otherwise, total friendly professionalism from everyone.
21. I had one last week. Made an appointment, turned up at Cobridge health centre. Was met by a security officer who explained the process, went in and was seen promptly. Could not fault it to be honest.
22. Received the following on info@  
I had to book a blood test through the new system. I am a shielding healthcare worker.  
I found it very simple, I did call sometime before my appointment was required so I easily got a time slot that I needed easily.  
When I attended Bradwell it was very well set up, it was the first time I had been out for some months but felt very comfortable and safe.  
Staff were lovely as usual.  
It was quick and easy.
23. I was able to book an appointment over the phone within 2 days. I was asked to stay in the car until a few minutes before the appointment. Everything was very organised, and I was dealt with kindly and efficiently.
24. The hospital sent for me at UHNM and referred me to a local outpatient surgery for blood tests.
25. Had a blood test at Brad we’ll hospital made a appointment and was allowed in 1minute before my time very quick and professional service, thank you, save our NHS.
26. Booked a blood test for my dad at Bentilee - was a good & smooth experience all round.
27. I had a blood test in June. They came from the hospital to my house as I was shielding. They telephoned the day before to let me know what time and the name of the person who was coming. Brilliant service.
28. I did go for a blood test and no I did not have a problem with booking hope i am just as lucky with flu vaccinations.

### Combination of services

29. Was a bit of a wait booking by phone. Eventually getting through I could only book a slot in the two weeks period. Arrived at appointment bang on time straight in.

30. Received the following on info@  
I tried over 25 times over 3 days to book an appointment. Once I got through the process was good and there was no wait time once I got there but I am not looking forward to having to book my repeat test this month.
31. Received the following on info@  
Did not go to blood tests because did not feel safe to do so and could not understand process. Also, bus services not working properly and nowhere to wait, I did not know how I could get there for the appointed time.
32. I needed a blood test 2 weeks ago. Called the number provided and got my appointment, no problem. Was given a choice of clinics. At my blood test I only waited 5 minutes and was called in. Very easy and no problems.
33. Blood test-Easy to make appt. Booked over the phone had to wait 8 days for appt which wasn't a problem. No waiting when I arrived for my appt. Fab service. Had results a couple of days after bloods taken.
34. Blood test-No problem booked over the phone Bradwell hospital had to wait for appt almost 2 weeks but went straight in Wednesday just gone had results back this morning all good.
35. Blood test- Took me numerous attempts to get thru on the phone, always engaged. Appointment was around a week and a half after I called, which was fine for me as there was no rush to have the test. I did however forget which day my appointment was on so phoned to check, I felt really bad I knew the time but not which day, the lady explained she had to check manually as it was only paper records . Appointment at Bradwell was fine, all on time and no issues
36. Blood test- Easy to book over the phone though was in a queue for about 12min. Appointment was 10 days later, arrived 3min before appointment, straight in, bloods done with a cheery nurse, no problem. Discussed my results two weeks later with my doctor over the phone. Just as slick as a walk in!
37. Had a test 2 weeks ago booked on the phone got there at the time they gave me straight in no waiting brilliant wish it were like that all the time
38. I had a blood test just over a week ago, rang and made an appointment, waited 2 minutes to go in and was back out in under 2 minutes. Really good service
39. I had a test a few weeks ago. I rang and got through quickly, appointment arranged at Bentilee Centre and when I attended, I did not wait long, in and out in no time. The staff in the centre and the nurse who took my blood



were all very helpful. The only downside (obviously due to Covid 19) is that I had to wait over a week for an appointment

40. Blood test- I have the appointment line was a nightmare took 64 attempts till I got through to speak to someone to arrange it. The test is itself was great though no delays, followed guidelines it was just the initial “arranging the appointment” that was the nightmare as everyone was directed to the same line for all different locations.
41. Over this period, I have Had two blood tests, normally done in my local surgery, this has stopped, and I now have to catch two buses to have the treatment
42. Nightmare at first took a full week to book one but now it is got better get straight through
43. I have had to have a few blood tests I actually prefer the system now you're in for your app time and out this system is good especially for hospital appointment
44. I phoned got my appointment walked straight in and all done in less than 5mins, brill
45. I've had 3 blood tests within 6 weeks first 2 very easy to book but third one took three days to get through but finally got one and booked my appointment at the clinic I required
46. I had a blood test a few weeks ago ,I was able to get through to telephone an appointment ,after 20 minutes ,I went Cobridge community centre for it ,very good social distancing and hand gel outside ,when you arrive ,but as I went to sit for my actual blood test ,I asked the nurse if the chair had been sprayed or the arm rests ,wiped between patients ,she said not at all ,I refused to sit and rest my arm on it until it was wiped ,which she did ,if you don't ask they do not disinfect or wipe ,so please ask if your vulnerable ,I was shocked that the nurse does not wear gloves and came out anxious
47. Blood test- I had one and was no bother in fact was better than usually is. Phoned get my appointment for when I could get there due to work. Arrived 2 mins before time due went straight in test done and on my way. Usually have to wait ages to go in
48. Booked over the phone had to wait a couple of days for the appointment, had the test and then received a text telling me 1 of the phials taken was not usable? Phoned for another appointment but nothing available locally in the following few weeks so had to travel to Stafford

49. Yes, had to have lots of blood tests since my crohns diagnosis in may this year, booked once at Bradwell hospital, once at Cobridge surgery and I've been to the royal stoke where you don't need an appointment, just walk in. No problems.
50. I had a blood test at Biddulph Primary Care Centre on Wednesday. I was anxious to have to go but it was fantastic, very well run and I felt extremely safe.
51. Both myself and a friend have had one and no bother at all in fact I thought it was better
52. Blood tests- Appointment system worked really well.
53. Blood test today and system is good
54. Blood test- Very efficient from ringing for appointment right through to having the actual blood test
55. I had a blood test about eight weeks ago at the Bentilee health Centre, very quick and very professional, in and out in ten minutes at the most
56. Had a blood test during lockdown. Appointment made no problem. Went at the time specified. Wore a mask and was in and out in 10 minutes. Totally efficient service
57. Blood test- No waiting around at bentilee health centre. Excellent service
58. Blood test- me and my daughter have both had 2 each. No problems making appointment for your over the phone and no problems at appointment. The staff were really nice
59. Blood test bookings have been in force throughout the lockdown. Used it quite a few times. Much better than having to sit and wait.
60. Blood test- I have had one. Rang to book in, waited outside until 5 mins before, sat inside with mask on and waited to be called in. I MUCH prefer this way of getting a blood test, I hated waiting for 2+ hours before. I would love this option moving forwards
61. Blood test- I tried persistently until I got through not an easy job but did it in the end.
62. I had a blood test two weeks ago I had to book a appointment and was asked where I would like to go I had to wait about a week on my arrival at Bentilee health centre I had to wait outside till I was called in and sat on

the waiting room to be called in I had to wear a mask but it was all very normal I did not wait to long for I was called in and the staff were very pleasant

63. Blood test- I booked, waited a week when I got there waited 10 mins and everyone was lovely. I would have preferred to get an early morning apt though as I had to take 1.5 hour off work and do a 10-mile round trip to and from.

64. I had a blood test a few weeks ago. I booked over the phone, was given a prompt appointment and clear instructions on where to go etc. Service was on time; staff were pleasant, and it all felt very safe. I attended Bradwell hospital

65. received the following on info@  
I had a blood test at Cobridge 2 weeks ago booked over the telephone. Waiting time of 2 weeks to get one. Nurses struggled to get blood and wrong test was carried out so have just booked another on the phone for next Friday. Waiting times for nearest (Bradwell) over 2 weeks but receptionist looked for the quickest and got me in at Bentley. Very helpful. I had tried on Monday to call for an appointment. After Waiting to get through for over an hour I was cut off. When trying again I was unable to get through for the rest of the day with either engaged tone or unavailable.  
I did try to book online today when hearing the message but when I tried it would not let me book. Tried every centre but no joy would only show available appointments but would not let me book.

66. blood tests (UHNM-online)- This service It is far more convenient than ringing. I hope it is not scrapped post COVID.

67. received the following on info@  
I used your on-line blood test service this morning. It took a fraction of the time of telephone service. Please, once COVID-19 is over, keep this on-line service

68. I am a transplant patient - so have to have regular blood tests for obvious reasons. I have had 3 blood tests all at Bradwell Hospital. The service was excellent - arrived on time - no one else in the waiting room - and in and out within 5 minutes. The downside was getting through on the phone line to actually make the appointments - each time it took me multiple attempts to get to speak to admin to book my 3 tests. If you can now book online for blood tests that is a positive step in the right direction IMHO

69. Blood test- I had a test 2wks ago and my husband 1wk ago no problems rang for appointment attended Bentley clinic

70. Received the following on info@

I have booked for myself and my mum to visit Bradwell phlebotomy Department. On both occasions it took some time, waiting on the telephone, to book an appointment. The second time was over an hour. I finally tried to book online but it took a while to find the link, and it was not over clear how to go about it. My 85-year-old mum who is mentally bright certainly wouldn't have managed it on her own. Also, the wait from booking to the tests were about 10 days- 2 weeks.

-However, the visit was very good. It was on time, clear how you should wait, and the staff were excellent. The actual visit was much better than previous when you had to wait in a busy waiting room. Especially during cold and flu seasons in the winter. A lot of people would probably pick up a cold or flu whilst waiting in such close proximity to each other. Something that seems more obvious since the pandemic.

-In summary, the booking was awful from the phone waiting until the lengthy appointment wait.

The appointment itself was efficient, friendly, and effective.

-If the booking system were better and the appointments were more frequent, I would much prefer this system - especially for my elderly mum.

-I have also arranged for the district nurses to do a blood test on my bed bound son, and this was as efficient as usual.

71. Blood test- Had to travel to Stafford county to get one done sooner. Anywhere closer was a 2 week wait. Which sadly was too long for me. However, the appointment itself was brilliant, being seen on time was great.

72. Blood tests- Had about 12, sometimes easier to get through on the phone than others, specially towards the last few tests

73. my hubby attended Bradwell a couple of weeks ago. It took a while to get through on the phone to arrange the appointment. Finally got through after a few days of trying. Had to wait a while though for the appointment as many of appointments taken. We were given advise over the phone on what/what not to do. We arrived on time at Bradwell. Hubby went in on his own with a mask on and was seen to immediately. He was in and out. No queueing. Wonderful service in these unsettled times.

74. I had a blood test at my home as I was shielding.

The nurse and I abided by cv19 secure methods to achieve my blood test. I called my GP and a date and time was organised for me. great service

75. I had another blood test last week. They came to my house as I'm shielded. They rang up and told me who was coming and gave me a time. Brilliant service again

76. I've had a blood test, rang at around 9am, got an apt for Bentilee the same day, as in and out in 5 mins.

## Appendix 2

### References

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