

One year with Covid-19: Experiences of **GP services** in Kingston before and during the coronavirus pandemic (January 2020 to March 2021)

One year with Covid-19: What you told us about your experiences of GP services in Kingston

PLEASE NOTE: The complete 15-month report brings collates experiences of health and social care services shared with Healthwatch Kingston through two surveys we ran between 1 January 2020 and 30 November 2020, along with additional experiences, views and concerns shared via our website, received in voice messages, emails and during virtual engagement events between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. You can read the full report [here](#) but we have also published a series of subject specific mini reports.

Healthwatch Kingston is pleased to be able to share this mini report about your **experiences of GP services** with you.

GP SERVICES

In summary: Most respondents that shared experiences about GP services ‘strongly agreed’ that they were able to access their GP service, despite noting pressures on services brought about by the pandemic and were ‘very satisfied’ with the quality of care received by GP practices across Kingston. Comments shared with Healthwatch Kingston did however indicate some variation in experiences, dependant on which GP practice and what treatment was required.

Many respondents said they were able get appointments and the switch to telephone and online appointments was handled smoothly and efficiently. Although, there were exceptions to this. People said, ongoing support was received throughout the pandemic. Generally, respondents reported good quality of care, citing, use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), reassuring diagnoses, good contact with GPs, and efficient pathways of care and referrals being made but again, there were exceptions to this.

Some respondents reported difficulty accessing services and getting appointments and when they tried elsewhere. Some shared poor service experiences with some reception teams, poor diagnosis, a “lack of concern or care” and frustration at only being able to talk about “one thing”. One person reported a worrying experience of not getting a shingles diagnosis, having to go to A&E and get treated by the hospital doctor instead and another said that a surgery had closed with some patients being sent to another for care.

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PLEASE NOTE: Healthwatch Kingston has agreed to meet with Kingston GP leads from the South West London Clinical Commissioning Group to discuss specific issues about named GP services raised by local people during this period.

Access to GP services

It was easy to access the help and support I needed from this service

Answered: 39 Skipped: 31

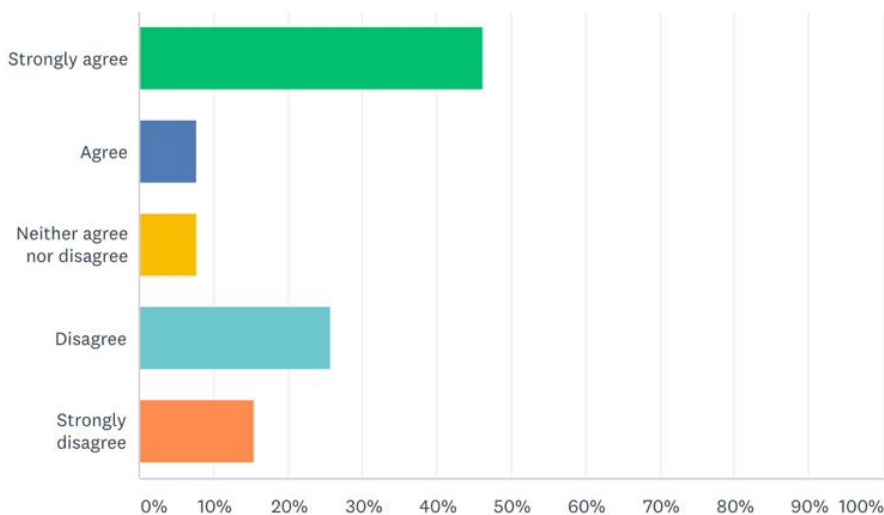


Figure 25: Experiences of access to GP services in Kingston.


Figure 25 shows that 18 (over half of the 39 respondents to this question) either strongly agreed or agreed that they were able to access care from their GP, 3 neither agreed nor disagreed, 10 disagreed and 6 strongly disagreed. 31 people skipped this question.

Some experiences of good access to GP services

About Kingston GPs:

- “The practice is changing to an online service. This seem to work reasonably well, and emails are answered quickly.”
- “Although closed to the general public, the service I required (zoladex injection) was provided as usual.”
- “My wife needed a blood test which was organised efficiently, and the blood test took place safely.”
- “Staff answering telephone very helpful and reassuring. Phone answered quickly.”
- “Easy to get an appointment.”

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 *GP was very helpful over phones and doctors always phoned back.”*

- “All GPs I dealt with were very supportive and clear what they were concerned about and listened very carefully to what I was saying. Ordered tests and after following up 3rd telephone consultation they decided that they wanted me to be seen by Kingston A&E. I was seen promptly, and again A&E staff were professional, courteous and efficient.”

 *Very accommodating, offering video calls. PPE when appointments are needed. I had a baby in March and have really appreciated ongoing support at the practice.”*


Some experiences of poor access to GP services

About Kingston GPs:

- “They closed the health centre and were only seeing people at [a different GP] in Kingston, which I could not get to, and I couldn't get an appointment with my GP.”
- “I couldn't get an appointment for my 1 yr. old who had a temperature without going through 111, despite being confident in this age group that it wasn't Covid.”

 *Difficult to get access to the surgery.”*

- “The practice is using a new online system. Emails don't reach doctors, reception staff are critical of patients who don't feel confident to use the internet form, doctors don't always wear a mask when walking round the practice.”
- “GP online or phone consultations were an effort to get - long explanations before consent and tests cancelled. Impression was that GPs were avoiding helping patients, yet they appeared to have had less work than usual.”
- “It is almost impossible to get an appointment. You have to call at 8am and repeatedly redial in the hope you can get through. If you try and call after 8.15 there is no point as the appointments are already gone.”

 *When I call the surgery, they have no appointments, and we have to call on the day at 8am and they will try to find us an appointment. Getting an appointment is very difficult.”*

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Quality of GP services

How satisfied were you with the care you received?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 31

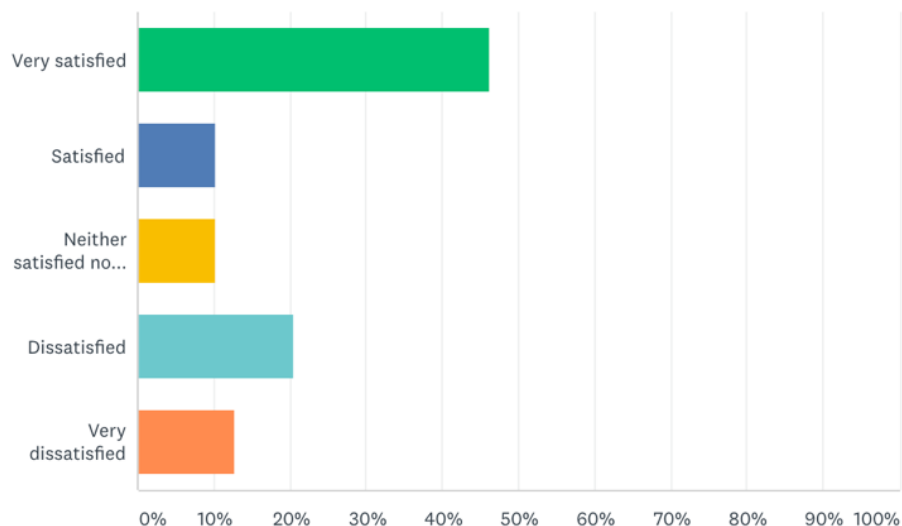


Figure 26: Experiences of the quality of GP services in Kingston.

Figure 26 shows that from the survey respondents who answered this question, the majority (56%) were either very satisfied (18 people) or satisfied (4 people) with the quality of care they received from their GP services during the pandemic. Out of the others, 4 were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 8 were dissatisfied and 5 were very dissatisfied.

Some experiences of good quality GP services

About Kingston GPs:

- “I felt reassured by GP about the plan suggested to determine diagnosis. Felt I could contact GP again before diagnosis made. GP very professional, knowledgeable and kind.”
- “Treatment was maintained even though full PPE was required.”
- “Blood test carried out efficiently by a very supportive specialist nurse.”
- “I received a text reminding me that my child was due their one-year vaccinations. As it was during the start of lockdown, I wasn't sure if such appointments were temporarily postponed. I called and got an appointment for the following day. On arrival the second entry doors were shut with a sign instructing us to wash our hands in the toilet next to the door, and ring the buzzer to be let in. The waiting room only had one other patient in. Staff on reception were wearing masks. The nurse was brilliant, as they always are with vaccinations. Very gentle a reassuring.”

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- “Whole pathway of care was efficient despite the Lockdown and definitely felt that all of the staff had my best interests to the forefront.”



When I finally managed to get an appointment, the phone call we had with the doctor was brilliant and very helpful. I appreciated the offer of a follow up video call.”

Some experiences of poor-quality GP services

About Kingston GPs:

- “Basic diagnostics were not provided for my daughter (aged 9) by GP. After £1000 worth of private diagnostics my daughter was diagnosed with a UTI and vitamin D deficiency. Both should have been easy to diagnose by the GP with access to her records and history. There should have been no need for private referral.”
- “Receptionists gave me wrong information, GPs gave me wrong diagnosis and treatment and when I made a complaint, the Practice Manager was rude and aggressive and threatened to remove me from the practice if I kept making complaints - and they eventually did remove me from their practice when I made another complaint.”
- “Delays with communication and doctors who rushed my appointments.”
- “I was seen in a room with no computer so there was no immediate access to my history. I had to tell the GP I was allergic to the first prescription and then tell her I was diabetic which was a surprise to her. Two days later I went through the call system again to tell the doctor my face was a lot worse and asked if I should go to A&E. The doctor said to wait and see so I emailed her a photo. At 6pm she rang to say she had seen the photo and I was really worse and needed to go to A&E immediately. A&E said I had shingles not cellulitis and changed tablets. By then it was too late to have anti virials to help prevent nerve pain, so I now have continuing nerve pain.”
- “When I do go to the doctors, they tell me I can only talk about one thing and as I don't often go to the doctors, I always have more than one thing to talk about. I always leave the surgery feeling unsatisfied because they never have time to answer my question.”



I requested an MRI and the GP advised I would not be seen so I had to make my own arrangements and pay. The report from the MRI meant I needed an ultrasound which again I had to arrange and pay for. I was left feeling very alone, having to do things for myself.

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6 *The doctor did [their] best to diagnose and prescribe over the telephone, but it was not comparable to a face-to-face-consultation.”*

GP services aftercare

Were you satisfied with any further treatment/care/support that you were offered?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 33

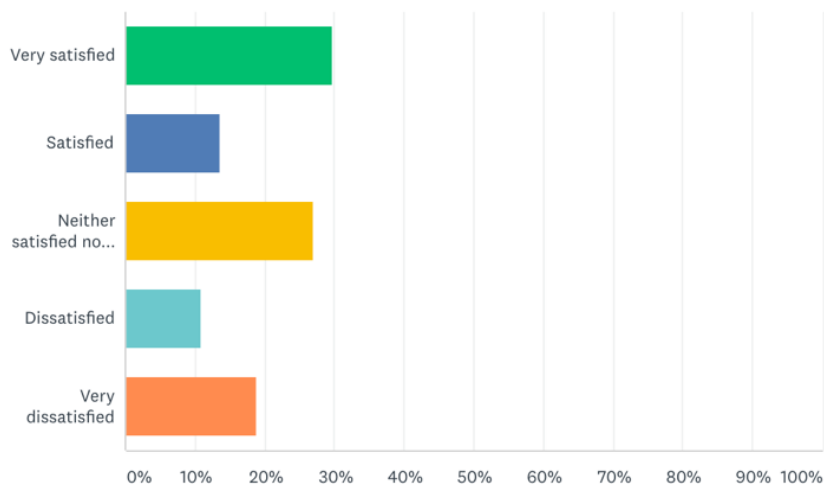


Figure 27: Experiences of GP services aftercare in Kingston.

Figure 27 shows 11 respondents to this question reported they were very satisfied with the aftercare provided by their GP, 5 were satisfied, 10 were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 were dissatisfied and 7 were very dissatisfied.

Some experiences of GP services good aftercare

About Kingston GPs:

- “I was informed that staff were available if required by phone.”
- “I was given leaflets about the vaccination and explained about the possible aftereffects.”
- “Consultant rang me, and I had a telephone consultation, he ordered CT scan which was done the next day. He then telephoned me with the results.”
- “Follow up and checks were made for my husband after discharge from hospital.”

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We received continuous support with daily phone calls to check on our conditions and offered us, if we needed, further medical assistance and re-assessment of our conditions.”

Some experiences of GP services poor aftercare

About Kingston GPs:

- “NHS referral has still not materialised, and we were forced to go privately because of intense pain. Consultant identified source of intense pain and we are relieved that we made that decision.”
- “Form to complete for a test was very badly explained.”
- “After three telephone consultations with GP, was finally referred to a specialist, but was told this would take at least two weeks, and would be a telephone consultation only.”
- “After A&E diagnosed shingles, there was no advice on nerve pain. My son who is a doctor told me to ask for pregabalin, so I then had to phone GP back who then prescribed it.”

ADDITIONAL GP SERVICES EXPERIENCES SHARED from other HWK sources:

“It can still be difficult to get an appointment at [my] surgery however, I was pleased with the way the doctor handled a very sensitive issue over the phone. Sending a photo or video when a condition is very personal, and of your child, makes you feel very uncomfortable. The doctor took the time to discuss the issue and found a way around having to go through this process. I really appreciated the respectful manner and accurate diagnosis without having to send images.”

One person with a learning disability said they had received their annual health and blood pressure check, flu jab and pneumonia vaccine. The practice made contact with them to remind them to book. “I was very impressed with service”.

“I have my flu jab booked for the start of November, but the GP didn’t call me to offer, as others have been doing for people with a learning disability.”



Another person with a learning disability said, “It’s October and I’ve not been called up by my GP for a flu jab.”

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“It’s very difficult to get GP appointments for my two toddlers when I need it the most. I’m either told I have to wait for 2 weeks for the next appointment or advised to go to A&E. I don’t feel it would be appropriate to go to A&E as it’s not a medical emergency and wouldn’t want to burden their service. Is there a way to have more appointments?”

“I am sick of listening to my GP surgery’s 10-minute recorded message whenever I ring, which ironically states that patient care is “our priority”, when it obviously isn’t, since they have closed the surgery and aren’t seeing any patients. They are only seeing patients at [a GP], which I can’t get to as I live in Surbiton and don’t have a car. In their 10-minute recorded message it says you can book appointments online, but I just logged in and it said I cannot book appointments online. Their website proves that the NHS has now been privatised as they are only offering paid for services - £35 for a video call with a physiotherapist or counsellor, £5 to speak to a pharmacist on the phone - without mentioning that all of these things are available free on the NHS. It is impossible to even speak to a GP on the phone, let alone see one in person. It is no wonder so many people are dying now as they can’t even get to see a GP. When I rang today, I was told the doctor was doing phone appointments, but they were all gone, but they were doing phone appointments for Wed, but I couldn’t pre-book an appointment. I have now found out that the receptionist was wrong to tell me that. When I last spoke to the doctor, they told me I would need to make an appointment to see them, but I cannot even get an appointment to speak to them on the phone let alone see them. [A different doctor] told me months ago I should make an appointment to see them, but I cannot get an appointment with them either.”



I made a complaint about the Practice Manager of [the] surgery last year but nothing was done about it.”

“On 14th October 2020, my GP stated on the phone that she would refer me for a left hip operation (as there was not cartilage in the hip joint socket after x-ray results). I did not hear anything for 3 weeks so when I phoned the reception of my GP, I was told to wait until 15th November before calling back. I called today, 16th November. The reception said it is nothing to do with them as they have already written for referral and I need to chase them up. I stated where have you written? Is it to Mr X at Epsom Hospital (this is because the doctor talked about writing to Mr X who performed my hip operation), as I have received

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nothing from you to state that you have written to them? The receptionist said it has only been 4 weeks and to wait and they wrote to Kingston Hospital. I said it is nearly 5 weeks and I cannot chase the hospital as they will ask me to go through my GP as the letter of referral was sent by them. The receptionist said it was nothing to do with them and a doctor will call back. A different GP called back and asking what I was calling about and I explained. He said in this Covid times it takes longer. I appreciate this. But I was told to phone on the 15th November as a month was reasonable time to receive some response in these times. They did not indicate how long I will need to wait again. This GP stated that he will get his secretary to chase this up. I understand in these covid times this may take longer than normal, but someone should indicate what normal time for response is. When I had asked the original GP, how long before an operation date, would it be like 3 to 6 months. She said she does not think it will take that long as NHS is now using private services but cannot tell how long it will take. I had stated that Mr X performed the right hip replacement but twice I have seen him within the last 4 years, and he has refused to replace left hip on the basis of back problem and not a hip problem and prescribed some tablets to deaden the nerves. I very quickly stopped having this medication, as I looked up on the internet and were definitely not for me. I did state to Mr X that my back was very strong, and I do not have any back issues, but he insisted and had written to me and the GP accordingly. I had stated to my GP that I did not feel back was the problem and I could not continue to have the medication as I wished to recover rather than deaden the nerves in my thighs, hips, knees and calves. Also I did not feel the pain was going away. GP prescribed Amitriptyline. This worked but having it continuously makes the pain come back. I stop using it and have it occasionally when in pain. Even then my legs get painful, thus waiting for a month made me call the GP. I appreciate there are a lot of people waiting for such responses and waiting to see Mr X's team or awaiting operation dates, but some indication of the time lag would be useful. Is it another month wait? This is just my feedback on the services.”



I would like to bring to attention that there is a severe lack of services for the victims of sexual abuse/violence. No statutory service is currently meeting the need or waiting lists for those lucky enough to be offered services is very long. Survivors are signposted to private therapy, with low-cost options also not appropriate for dealing with the complex trauma. The cheapest option available to me was £55 per hour, I have been told I will need therapy for 2

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years. This will cost me around £6000. I've been told by GPs to "invest" in my health and pay. However, this seems unjust, I didn't choose to be sexually abused, I was failed by services throughout my childhood to safeguard myself. Now I am footing the bill to be able to recover."

"Our GP service have been truly amazing providing support and aftercare...excellent doctors who care for their patients' welfare."

 *Long before Covid, it has been extremely difficult to contact my [GP] surgery about better care for my numerous pre-existing health conditions. These have been very trying and have worsened considerably during lock down. I have very severe arthritis all over, particularly in my neck, knees, back and feet. I also have a fractured spine. Due to severe and unpredictable IBS, going out is a nightmare. This is because with cafes and restaurants and pubs out of bounds, there is no access to toilets. I believe it is the same in supermarkets. Another with the same thing and form of arthritis recently was brave enough to raise this issue on one of these 'phone in' programmes."*

Healthwatch Kingston sources:

- 'Experiences of NHS and social care services in Kingston before and during the Coronavirus pandemic: Snapshot report #1'.*
- 'Let's Talk' engagement session with people with a learning disability at Kingston Mencap on 3 November 2020 (9 people with a learning disability and carers attended).*
- Additional (non-survey) NHS and social experiences shared with Healthwatch Kingston website, in emails and during virtual community engagement events between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.*

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Thank you, and next steps!

Healthwatch Kingston would like to thank everyone that has shared their experiences with us. Everything we say and do is informed by what local people tell us.

So sensitive issues that have been shared can also contribute to identified areas requiring improvement, Healthwatch Kingston will meet with Kingston GP leads from the South West London Clinical Commissioning Group, hospital, social care and other leads to discuss specific issues about services raised by local people.

During this period, whilst maintaining our independence, Healthwatch Kingston has also worked collaboratively with a range of organisations including Kingston Council, NHS south west London, schools and Kingston voluntary and community sector organisations on other Covid-19 related engagement work with residents. These included:

- [Young People's Wellbeing During the Covid-19 Crisis](#)
- [Tell us what you thought about Test and Trace and the NHS Covid-19 App](#)
- [Tell us what you think about the Covid-19 vaccination](#)
- [Residents, family, and friends' experiences of Care Homes during Covid-19.](#)

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“Tell us what you think about NHS and social care.”

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