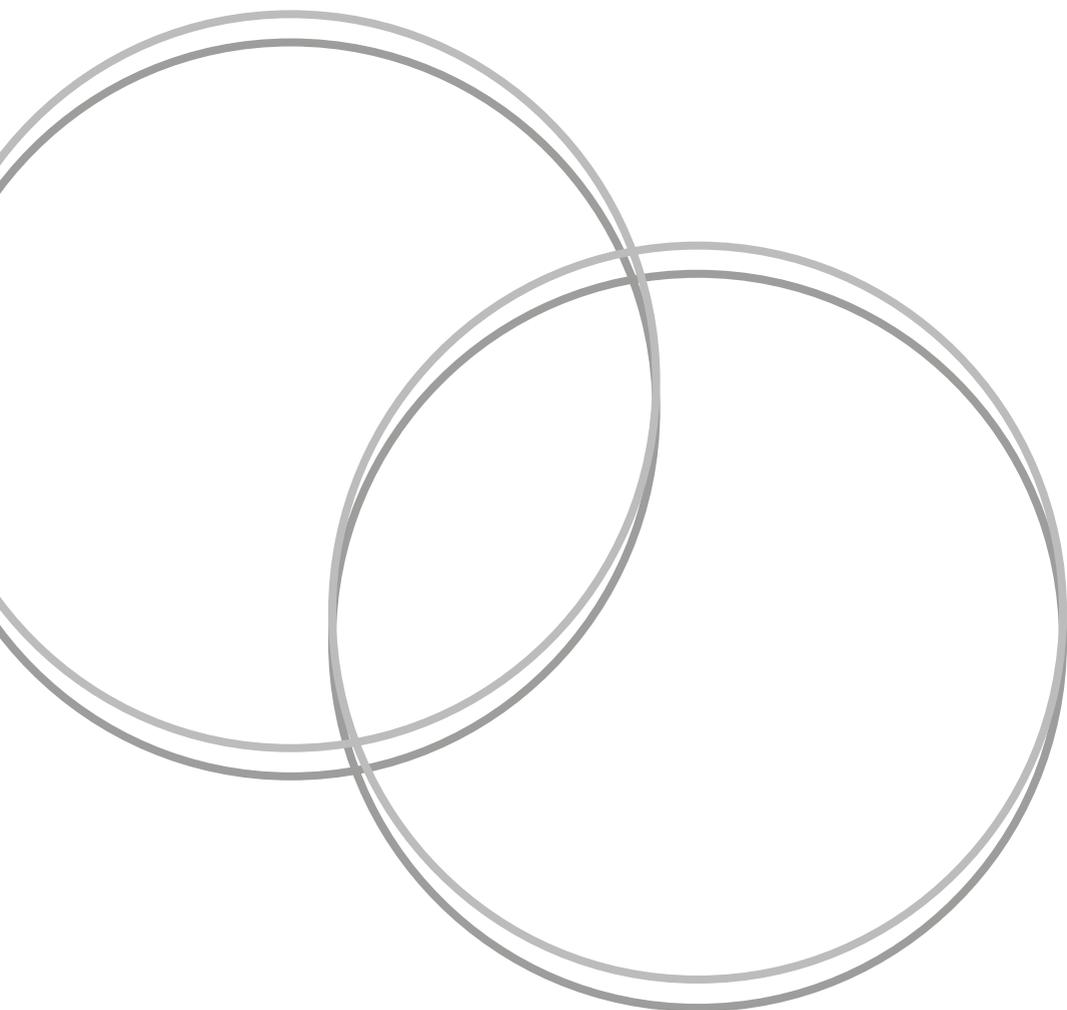




Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Accident and Emergency: Why You May Have to Wait

Information for patients





This leaflet explains why patients may have a long wait to be seen when they attend the accident and emergency departments.

## **Why is it so busy?**

Each year, approximately 150,000 patients attend Oxford University Hospitals emergency departments, 100,000 at the John Radcliffe Hospital, 50,000 at the Horton Hospital. That is over 400 patients a day across the two departments.

The hospital tries to make sure that there are enough doctors and nurses on duty. There are more staff in the evenings when they know more patients will arrive.

Sometimes when lots of patients arrive at the same time, or the hospital is already so full such that we are unable to move patients who need to be admitted to wards, the waiting areas and treatment areas will become overcrowded.

We know that limited space, bright lights and excessive noise can make the waiting areas very uncomfortable.

## **Can I find out how long I will have to wait?**

The staff will tell you how long the waiting times are when you arrive. There is a display in the waiting room with waiting times. However, as patients with more serious conditions are given priority these waiting times are only approximate.

## **Why are waiting times so long?**

Patients with more urgent problems will be seen first. Other patients will be seen in order of arrival.

The longest waiting times are usually for patients who arrive between 10pm and 8am as there are fewer doctors on duty.

## **Why can't I wait in a bed?**

Sometimes there are more patients than beds. Beds are offered to patients who need them most.

## **What should I do if I am in pain or getting worse?**

Please let a member of staff know if you are in pain – they will give you some medication as soon as possible. If you are getting worse, please tell the staff.

## **What are the alternatives to waiting?**

Patients who arrive at busy times with less urgent problems may wait a long time to see a doctor. For example, someone who arrives in the department during the night with a problem that does not require immediate attention may not see a doctor until the following morning.

If your problem is not urgent or an emergency, and the waiting times are very long, especially at night, you may wish to consider alternatives to waiting:

### **Rest at home and return in the morning, when it is less busy for:**

- small wounds that are not actively bleeding
- joint injuries, especially if you can move them and /or walk
- any problem that you have had for more than two weeks and is not getting worse.

### **See your GP for problems such as:**

- high blood pressure readings
- rashes or skin problems
- medication requests.

### **See a local Pharmacist:**

- coughs, sore throats
- earache.

### **See a Dentist:**

- If you have toothache but you are able to open your mouth and swallow normally, and you do not have a fever or significant facial or neck swelling.

## **What if I have a mental health crisis?**

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, you can get support with Oxfordshire Safe Haven by calling **01865 903 037** between 11.30am and 9.30pm.

**There is more information on the following website:**

**[www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service\\_description/oxfordshire-safe-haven/](http://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/service_description/oxfordshire-safe-haven/)**

## **How can I make a complaint?**

If you wish to make a complaint, please address it to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

### **PALS office**

John Radcliffe Hospital  
Headley Way  
Oxford, OX3 9DU

Telephone: **01865 221 473**

Email: **[pals@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@ouh.nhs.uk)**

### **PALS office**

Horton General Hospital  
Oxford Road  
Banbury, OX16 9AL

Telephone: **01295 229 259**

You can also email: **[feedback@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@ouh.nhs.uk)**

For more information, please visit: **[www.ouh.nhs.uk](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk)**





## Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: William Gibbs - Emergency Department  
January 2024  
Review: January 2027  
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
[www.ouh.nhs.uk/information](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/information)



*Making a difference across our hospitals*

[charity@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:charity@ouh.nhs.uk) | 01865 743 444 | [hospitalcharity.co.uk](http://hospitalcharity.co.uk)

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

