



Primary Care Briefing

New online self-referral service for adult women with a new breast lump

1. OVERVIEW

A new digital service has launched in the Manchester locality to allow women with a breast lump to self-refer to secondary care diagnostic clinics. Instead of booking a GP appointment, patients can complete an online assessment via NHS 111 online. This provides an additional route into breast services and aims to improve timely access, support earlier diagnosis and ease pressure on GP services.

2. WHAT PRACTICES NEED TO DO

Please brief your practice staff on this new service, including GPs, receptionists, care navigators and triage teams.

When a patient contacts the surgery with the relevant symptoms (female patients over 30 with a new painless breast lump), staff can signpost them to the NHS online breast symptom checker by sending them the following text message:

If you have a new breast lump, you can use the NHS online breast symptom checker to see if you can self-refer to a breast clinic without seeing a GP first: <https://111.nhs.uk/check-breast-symptoms>

If you do not wish to use this service, have problems using it, or are not given an appointment with the breast clinic, please contact the practice immediately for an urgent appointment.

Important: This service is fully live. Staff should not use the live system to test how it works as this will generate a referral.



3. PATIENT ELIGIBILITY

To access the service, patients complete a symptom assessment on NHS 111 Online. If they meet the eligibility criteria, they will be offered the option to self-refer to breast clinic.

Patients who do not meet eligibility criteria will be advised where to get help, including contacting their GP.

Patients are eligible to self-refer if they are:

- female;
- aged 30 years or over; and
- have a new painless breast lump

Patients are not eligible if they:

- Are male
- Are pregnant
- Are under 30 years old
- Have a fever
- Have breast pain
- Have nipple discharge

4. HOW THE SELF-REFERRAL PROCESS WORKS

1. The patient accesses NHS 111 Online via the web or the NHS app
2. The patient completes the digital symptom assessment questions
3. If eligible, they are offered the option to self-refer to a breast clinic
4. The referral is transmitted to Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT)
5. MFT contacts the patient directly to book an appointment
6. The patient is assessed via standard breast diagnostic pathways
7. The GP receives an outcome letter following assessment

When the patient chooses self-referral, they will receive information and reassurance about what to expect during their clinic visit, including the likely duration and the tests they may be offered. They will also be provided with a telephone number and e-mail address for the clinic, which they can use to chase-up their referral if required.



5. IMPLICATIONS FOR GENERAL PRACTICE

GPs can continue to refer patients as usual using the standard suspected cancer and symptomatic breast referral forms. This remains unchanged. The self-referral route is an additional option.

6. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- Reduces the need for GP consultation in straightforward presentations
- Reduces administrative burden of referral form completion
- Maintains GP oversight through outcome communication
- Supports faster access into diagnostics
- Empowers patients with more choice

7. SAFETY AND GOVERNANCE

All referrals are clinically triaged. MFT retains operational oversight and local control of capacity. Safeguards are in place to prevent service overwhelm, including the ability to pause the pathway if required. The pathway aligns with existing clinical governance and cancer waiting time standards.

Patients should be advised to contact their GP practice urgently if:

- They do not wish to use the self-referral service
- They have any problems using the self-referral service
- They are unable to arrange an appointment with the breast clinic

8. EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

This is a Manchester locality pilot.

We will collect data on referral volumes, cancer conversion rates, impact on primary care and breast services, patient experience, and primary care feedback.

Findings will inform decisions about expansion across Greater Manchester.

9. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you or your team have any questions about how this new service works, please contact

Claire Goldrick, Pathway Manager for Breast

claire.goldrick@nhs.net