

PATHWAY FOR INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF ACUTE FACIAL PARALYSIS IN PRIMARY CARE / ACCIDENT & EMERGENCY

ASSESS FOR RED FLAGS

Medical, Neurology (or Stroke team) referral if

- Forehead sparing facial weakness, other neurological symptoms.
- Systemic illness.
- Lyme disease.
- Recurrent or bilateral palsy.

ENT referral if

- Gradual onset >1/12 ? tumour.
- Parotid/neck mass, history of regional cancer.
- Ear discharge or symptoms, unilateral hearing loss.
- Progressive or fluctuating symptoms.

EXAMINE FOR SYMPTOMS

- Neurological: cranial, upper & lower limbs.
- Ears, nose and throat.
- Systemic conditions. (Lyme disease commonest cause of acute onset facial palsy in children)

REFER on if uncertain

EYE CARE ADVICE (for all patients)

- Eye care advice leaflet\*.
- Safety net advice.
- Prescribe:  
Day: regular preservative-free (PF) eye drops, e.g. Hylo-forte.  
Night: use PF eye ointment, e.g. Xailin.

NO RED FLAGS | NO DIAGNOSTIC UNCERTAINTY

RED FLAGS IDENTIFIED | DIAGNOSTIC UNCERTAINTY

Referral to Medical, Neurology or Stroke team for urgent review

FacialPalsy<sup>UK</sup>  
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For more information visit  
[www.facialpalsy.org.uk](http://www.facialpalsy.org.uk)



Is there full gentle eye closure?

Yes - continue with safety net advice.

No

Does the eye look red/cloudy/absent Bell's phenomenon/loss of corneal sensation?

Yes

No - continue with safety net advice.

Urgent referral to Ophthalmology

If same day appointment not available, patient to attend eye casualty.

BELL'S PALSY or RAMSAY HUNT SYNDROME (RHS)?

The following are suggestive of RHS

- Severe pain in or around the ear, face, head or mouth.
- Vertigo or dizziness/nausea.
- Hearing loss/tinnitus.
- Vesicles in ear/mouth/throat/hairline.

Note that there isn't always a rash (Zoster Sine Herpete).

- 1: **Commence steroids** (within 72hrs). Use approved protocol e.g. NICE.
2. **Add antivirals** (within 72 hrs) unless certainty that diagnosis is Bell's palsy.
- 3: **Eye care advice.**
- 4: **Review** at appropriate interval.
- 5: **Refer:** if complex symptoms or if inadequate response to treatment within 3 weeks.



\*Eye care advice leaflet: <https://www.learn.facialpalsy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Eye-care.pdf>