

# Patient Update

Newsletter for Patient Participation Groups

October 2020



## Stay well this winter

Health and social care teams across Berkshire West have joined forces to ensure an effective, efficient and co-ordinated response to the challenges winter will put on services.

Hospital clinicians and staff, GPs, mental health organisations, ambulance teams and local councils have drawn up a comprehensive plan to make sure services are working well together and prepared for winter, flu and Covid-19.

Winter is always a very pressured time for the NHS with the cold weather and hazardous conditions leading to increased demands on GPs and the hospital's Emergency Department (ED). This, coupled with Covid-19, means it's even more essential for health and social care teams to provide joined up care and services that best meet the needs of local communities.

Dom Hardy, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust's Chief Operating Officer, said: "Our winter planning this year looks very different because of Covid-19. However, we are fully prepared, building on the good work we've done over previous winters, and using all the information we've learned during Covid. We've always worked closely with our partners, locally, regionally and nationally, to maximise resources and expertise to provide efficient and joined up services, and we've escalated this now to make sure people know how to access care and which service is the most appropriate for their particular needs.

"Of course if they have genuinely life-threatening conditions like serious chest pains or a stroke then they must come to ED. But if people are unwell and unsure where to go for help there is a range of options open to them including NHS 111 online, their local pharmacy, minor injuries unit or their GP," he added.

"We're working hard to keep on top of our planned and emergency work and to do this safely whilst also caring for Covid patients, but we need the co-operation of local people here. If anyone has an appointment they must attend – the hospital is perfectly safe and it's important we continue to manage patient's healthcare and treatment." Dr Abid Irfan, Chair of the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) (pictured right) said: "GP surgeries are all open for business and it's essential people contact us if they are worried about things like lumps, unexpected bleeding or weight loss.



"People are asked to ring or make contact with their surgery online where their concerns will be triaged and we'll discuss with them the most appropriate course of action.

“NHS 111 gives people the opportunity to talk to fully trained advisors available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and they have access to relevant healthcare professionals including nurses, emergency dentists, mental health support and GPs,” he added.

“And of course there is a lot people can do to help themselves stay well over winter - stock up on painkillers and suchlike, eat healthily, limit alcohol to the recommended limits, stop smoking, try and keep warm, have a flu jab and take some exercise. There’s a wide range of support and advice on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) about ways to do this,” said Dr Irfan.

South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SCAS) is also preparing for an increase in demand over winter. Kerry Gregory, Clinical Operations Manager for SCAS said: “We are reminding people of the wide range of medical services available to them like pharmacists and NHS 111. If they make the most use of these services it means we can get to people who are in need of urgent medical care.”

A ‘winter wellbeing’ fact sheet has been produced giving useful information about the range of healthcare options available to people and encouraging them to get ready for winter. It’s [available here](#).

## Mental Health – please look after yourselves and keep an eye out for others

The dark, cold days of winter are often times people feel more lonely, isolated and depressed so it’s helpful to know there’s a range of mental health services that are easy to access from your home or phone – for free.



For younger people aged 11-18 there’s KOOOTH.com which is an anonymous and confidential online counselling and emotional wellbeing support service. Anyone over the age of 18 can ring 0300 365 2000 and self-refer to the Talking Therapies counselling team.

And for more urgent mental health concerns the number is 0300 365 0300 or you can ring NHS 111 who will triage your call and point you in the right direction of people who can help.

Remember that the Samaritans offer a free listening and support service which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Their number is 116 123. And in a crisis situation if someone is in immediate danger then you must call 999 straight away.

The healthcare teams across Berkshire West – the CCG and Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust – are working very closely with a range of other partners including the police, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and the local authorities to provide a comprehensive package of support and care for people with mental health problems.

A 14-point plan of action to make the range of mental health services easier to access has been drawn up following a lengthy consultation with service users and other key stakeholders.

This work is in line with the national NHS Long Term Plan which commits to delivering the fastest expansion of mental health services in the NHS’s history, with a renewed commitment to improve and widen access to care for children and adults needing mental health support.

## Flu jabs – help protect yourselves and others

Health officials and council chiefs across Berkshire West have launched a high profile campaign aimed at encouraging as many people as possible to have a flu jab. It comes as hospitals and GPs, gearing up for the next phase of Covid-19, are worried flu patients will put further strain on health and social care teams.

Flu kills around 11,000 people across the UK each year and puts many more in hospital. This year the biggest ever flu vaccination programme has been launched with the aim of reaching around 30million people.



The flu virus kills thousands every year.  
The flu vaccine is the best protection  
for you and those around you.

**JUST GET YOUR FREE FLU JAB**  
Ask your pharmacist or GP if you're eligible.



GP surgeries and pharmacies in Berkshire West have already vaccinated thousands of people who are in the high clinical risk groups including the over 65s and those with other health problems like diabetes or kidney disease.

The School Aged Immunisation Team has started clinics in local schools and will provide flu vaccinations to around 50,000 pupils across Berkshire West. This plays a vital role in protecting the population as children can spread the flu virus easily. Parents/Guardians of school aged children will be receiving consent forms and it is essential these are completed so youngsters can be protected.

Each year there is a new strain of the flu virus which means the vaccine changes annually so people who had a vaccination last year must still

have one again now. People are also being reminded that the flu vaccination does not protect them from Covid -19 so they must still adhere to national messages on hand hygiene, social distancing and wearing face masks. And if they have symptoms like a fever, cough, sore throat and headaches and are unsure whether they are possibly flu or could be Covid, they should contact NHS 111 or their local GP for advice.

Dr Abid Iran, Chair of the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, said: "Flu is an extremely contagious virus which can make people very ill, particularly those in the high risk groups. These patients have been prioritised to receive their flu vaccines and GP surgeries are in the process of contacting them and inviting them for vaccination. Staff running the flu vaccination clinics are ensuring social distancing is in place to help keep you safe.

"Obviously this year's flu campaign is being done against the backdrop of Covid-19 which makes it even more important for people to act responsibly and get a vaccination to protect not just themselves, but others too," he added.

"Our health and social care systems have been under huge pressure over the last six months dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and then the inevitable backlogs that have built up over this time, so it's vital we all do everything we can to support the NHS by keeping ourselves protected and well," said Dr Irfan.

The groups eligible for a free flu vaccination are:

- those aged 65 years and over
- people who have long-term health conditions, such as: A heart problem, chest complaint or breathing difficulties, a kidney disease, lowered immunity due to treatment, diabetes, heart, liver disease, neurological conditions, those seriously overweight (BMI of 40 and above)
- pregnant women
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- those who receive a carers allowance, or are the main carer for an older or disabled person who may be at risk if you get ill
- members of a shielding household. Full [list here](#).
- pre-school children (aged 2 to 3 years on 31 August 2020)
- primary school aged children and those in Year 7 (aged 4 to 11 on 31 August 2020)
- Frontline health and social care workers

## Walk-in Centre – new booking system for appointments

Reading's Walk-In Centre has reopened this month but is now operating on a **booking only basis**. All appointments will be booked by NHS 111 - there will be no 'walk in' service available. People are being advised not to attend the Centre unless they have been given an appointment with a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional. Anyone who goes to the Centre without a booked appointment will be triaged on the door and referred to either their GP or NHS 111 unless they have life threatening symptoms like central chest pains or respiratory difficulties.

The Walk-In Centre will be open seven days a week from 8am to 8pm. The Primary Care Hub offering face-to-face clinical assessment for local people with suspected Covid symptoms will also continue to operate from the same site. Strict measures have been put in place so the Centre stays a safe place for patients and enables them to keep socially distanced during their time there.

## Lights, camera, action - health staff help spread vital messages in foreign language videos

A series of four foreign language videos featuring hospital staff talking about important health issues has been issued to reassure people who need to attend for appointments and surgery that it's safe to do so.

The films are in Polish, Nepalese, Portuguese and Swahili and more are planned in other languages including Arabic and Punjabi. They are aimed at people who are still reluctant to attend for important hospital appointments or operations because they are worried about Covid and feel they may be a burden on NHS staff or that they may catch Covid.



The films outline the measures being taken to keep people safe and looked after when they come into hospital including new one-way walking systems around the site, face masks, social distancing in waiting areas and in-depth cleaning of clinical areas between patient appointments.

Nicky Lloyd, Acting Chief Executive of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, said: “It’s vitally important people attend for appointments so we can monitor their healthcare issues and deal swiftly with any problems before they become more serious. There is obviously a backlog of work that’s built up during Covid and we are doing all we can to manage this, but we do need the co-operation of our local communities in helping us to stay on top of our waiting lists and keep everyone safe and well.”

You can access the films via the links below:

- Nepalese: <https://youtu.be/Z3C36ZTyKG4>
- Portuguese: <https://youtu.be/KF6j4rdKEW4>
- Polish: <https://youtu.be/u0hyFql7tow>
- Swahili: <https://youtu.be/JiNIMSN6iZU>

## Cancer – call for action if you spot any worrying signs

A leading local GP has added her voice to a national campaign calling on people to contact their doctor if they are worried about symptoms that could be cancer.

The NHS launched its ‘Help Us to Help You’ publicity campaign this morning after research showed nearly half (48 per cent) of the public said they would delay or not seek medical help.

Many said they didn’t want to be a burden on the health services whilst others said they were worried about getting Covid 19 or passing it on to others and this is why they didn’t seek help.

The figures showed that more than four in ten people said they would leave it longer to get health advice than they would normally have before the Covid 19 outbreak.

But Dr Kajal Patel, GP clinical Lead for Cancer for Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, and MacMillan GP for Berkshire West, warned this could have serious consequences for some cancers. She said NHS staff had pulled out all the stops to keep cancer services going throughout the pandemic, and surgeries and hospitals have done all they can to keep patients safe when they attend for appointments.

Dr Patel said: “cancer is easier to treat when it’s caught at an earlier stage and so we really want people to come forward for a check – it could save your life.

“The symptoms people should look out for are changes in bowel habits, including blood in your poo, unexplained weight loss, a lump, persistent bloating or a pain that doesn’t go away,” added Dr Patel.

“Our surgeries are all open for business. Please don’t think you’re a burden on them because they’re busy with Covid. They are there to keep everyone safe and well and, like cancer teams throughout the UK they want to ensure that a cancer diagnosis, treatment and care continues as much as possible.”

Help Us Help You is being backed by big name celebrities. TV chef Gordon Ramsay said: “as we head into winter it’s really important we remember that despite Covid 19, the NHS can still see us safely. I’m really pleased to help with this message to reassure the public and remind them that the NHS is here for them when they need it.”

## Cancer Rehab Health & Wellbeing virtual

The Royal Berkshire Hospital's Cancer Rehab Team is holding some virtual Health & Wellbeing patient workshops to help and advise on a variety of topics. For more information about dates & times please email [cancer.rehabilitation@nhs.net](mailto:cancer.rehabilitation@nhs.net) or call 01344 662909.

Cancer Rehabilitation Team  
[Cancer.Rehabilitation@nhs.net](mailto:Cancer.Rehabilitation@nhs.net)  
Tel: 01344662909

Royal Berkshire **NHS**  
NHS Foundation Trust

The **Cancer Rehab** team would like to invite you to attend one of our virtual interactive Health and Wellbeing workshops

Upcoming topics include:

- ✓ Diet
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Managing fatigue
- ✓ Covid-19 and Cancer
- ✓ Psycho-sexual issues
- ✓ Relaxation Technique
- ✓ Managing breathlessness
- ✓ Psychological Impact of cancer



Questions and sharing of experience is welcome

**Location:** The comfort of your own home via a link which will be forwarded to you by email

**Times:** Workshops are 1 hour long

For further information on dates, times and to confirm your attendance please contact [cancer.rehabilitation@nhs.net](mailto:cancer.rehabilitation@nhs.net) or call **01344 662909** and leave a message

*We look forward to welcoming you on the day!*

## Hydrotherapy consultation

There's only a few days left to take part in a public consultation on the future provision of hydrotherapy services in Berkshire West which closes on 2 November.

The consultation is part of a review of services to make health care fit for purpose and ensure money is being spent wisely to provide modern, efficient and effective services for the benefit of as many people as possible.



Further information and the questionnaire is on the BWCCG website [www.berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk/hydrotherapy](http://www.berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk/hydrotherapy)

## Hidden carers Freephone number extended



**'I am her son not her carer'**

If you are looking after a relative there is help for you.

**Call freephone: 0800 133 7851**



Lines open 10am - 4pm, Monday - Friday. With 24 hour answerphone cover

A special Freephone number for people caring for others has been extended until the end of the year.

Many people who carry out caring responsibilities do not recognise themselves as carers and just think they are helping a friend or family member. However, they may benefit from some support and don't know what help is out there.

The Freephone number is 0800 1337851 and there's more information on the [CCG website here](#).

## Piercing advice

People are being urged to take sensible measures when having body piercings after a couple of serious cases of keloid were raised at a recent Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Committee.

Keloid is a raised scar which can occur after a piercing and which can sometimes lead to serious problems like limited movement if located on a joint. Research has shown people with dark skin, and those aged between 10 and 30 years are most prone to keloid problems, particularly with any procedure from chest level and above. The condition can be painful and leave disfiguring scarring which need steroid injections, laser treatment or surgery. Among the cases being considered by the CCG, surgery had been unsuccessful in containing the condition and the scars had grown back.

Debbie Simmons, Director of Nursing from the CCG said: “given the fact that keloid cases are more common amongst younger people, some of them young children, we’d encourage people with the relevant skin type to think carefully before proceeding with piercings due to their increased risk of developing keloid’

“We’d certainly ask people not to do any piercings themselves and if they do go ahead, to seek the services of professional piercers.”

