

COVID-19 COMMUNITY HUB ARRANGEMENTS

Dear colleagues

We are writing to update you regarding changes to support triage and assessment of COVID-19 cases. These changes will be introduced from Monday 23 March 2020 at 0800.

The current situation with COVID-19 is causing unprecedented demand across the entire NHS. We need to take steps to ensure that this demand does not overwhelm our ability to deal with patients suffering from other ailments. In general practice, this means we need to protect staff from contact with patients with COVID-19 and direct triage of COVID-related presentations to a newly established dedicated community hub.

From Monday 23 March 2020 from 0800 onwards, all COVID related presentations only [NHSinform](#) and NHS 24 on 111 will form the first point of contact for all COVID-19 related symptoms during the in-hours period.

Calls will be triaged through NHS24 on 111 down to a local (non-patient facing) hub staffed with clinicians drawn from across both primary and secondary care. People who need to be seen will be offered appointments at dedicated local assessment centres, staffed and equipped to deal with COVID-related presentation.

From Monday 23 March from 0800 onwards, public messaging will direct people who are unwell and worried about COVID-19 to consult NHS inform and phone NHS 24 111 as the first point of contact, not their GP. It is important there is no prior announcement of this at the weekend as NHS 24 is currently updating its systems to implement this change.

Local hub teams will be working closely with you to help ensure they connect into local systems and add value and support to what is already working well. Staffing of hubs and assessment centres will require clinicians to be drawn from across primary and secondary Care. These requests will of course have to be managed against the backdrop of ongoing demand for both primary and secondary care services.

Also, from Monday 23 March, the community pharmacy Minor Ailment Service is being extended to allow anyone registered with a GP practice, who has a minor illness or a common condition, to speak to a member of the pharmacy team for advice and treatment without the need to see their GP. The extended Minor Ailment Service will support the COVID-19 community hubs and assessment centres by enabling the supply of supportive treatments.

As part of a wider Scottish Government communications plan to highlight these changes, two main Twitter handles will be Tweeting messages on Monday morning around these changes: @ScotGov and @NHS24. Practices that have Twitter and would like to re-tweet these messages are encouraged to do so, so that we can get this message to all members of the public as quickly as possible. **You may also wish to update practice telephone messages, websites and Facebook pages to**

reflect these new arrangements. I also attach the latest version of the Q&A for patients that will be hosted on the [NHS Inform](#) website from Monday morning.

Finally we would like to say a huge and heartfelt thank you to every one of you and your practice teams for the superb response over the past few weeks. The current situation and the demand it has placed on us is unprecedented in our lifetimes, and the role of general practice has never been more recognised and appreciated.

Three handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged horizontally. The first signature is 'A. Grisewood', the second is 'Andrew Buist', and the third is 'Carey Lunan'.

Aidan Grisewood
Co-Director Community
Health and Social Care
Scottish Government

Andrew Buist
Chair of the Scottish
General Practitioners
Committee of the BMA

Carey Lunan
Chair of the Royal
College of General
Practitioners

Annex A - COVID-19 Hubs and Assessment Centre Q&A

Should I be going to hospital if I feel unwell?

As always – if you have a critical medical emergency, phone 999.

If it's not an emergency;

- If you have mild symptoms or are looking for information
Please visit www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus. If you can't find the answer please call the special helpline on 0800 028 2816
- If you have COVID-19 symptoms:
If you need more advice than is available online at NHS Inform, call NHS 24 on 111.
- For all other health matters:
Call your GP. You should only call NHS 24 if your GP is closed and you cannot wait until they reopen.

Why are you changing the advice you have been giving before?

Due the very large numbers of people trying to seek advice about COVID-19 it's important that people can do this quickly and easily.

By phoning NHS 24 on 111 instead of your GP for help or advice if you have coronavirus symptoms, you are freeing up capacity for GPs to do what they do best – focusing on managing other complex conditions and looking after patients in their communities.

I am managing my care at home, what should I do if my symptoms get worse?

If your symptoms get worse, please check on NHS Inform or if you feel you need additional help or advice please call NHS 24 on 111.

If you do not have any COVID-19 symptoms, please only call NHS 24 if your GP is closed and you cannot wait until they reopen.

When do I phone NHS 24 and when do I phone my GP?

If you think you might have COVID-19 and can manage your care at home, please don't call either your GP or NHS 24. The NHS Inform website has lots of useful information for you if you are self-isolating with COVID-19 symptoms. If, however, that doesn't answer your COVID-19 question please call NHS 24 on 111 any time, day or night 24/7.

If your concern *isn't* about COVID-19 and the NHS Inform website can't answer your question, please call your GP as normal. If your GP is closed for the day and your query can't wait you can call NHS 24 on 111.

What will happen when I call NHS 24 on 111?

If you call during the day, with a non COVID-19 issue, you will be asked to call your GP. The 111 service will focus solely on COVID-19 when GP surgeries are open.

If you are calling with COVID-19 symptoms, the first person you'll speak to will be a call handler. They'll ask you:

- who you are
- where you're calling from
- why you're calling

This is because they will need to know as much about you and your health as possible so you receive the best help and advice. The more they know the more easily they can help you, especially if we need to refer you to another NHS service.

Any information you provide, will be treated in accordance with [data protection policy](#).

They will use the answers you give to help them build up a picture of your condition. From that they will either answer your question or give additional advice that will allow you to continue to self-isolate at home, or if required they will transfer your call to your local Community Hub where someone will be able to assist you further. It is anticipated that the majority of people will be able to manage their symptoms at home, allowing the NHS to focus on those people who are very unwell.

If you do not have any COVID-19 symptoms, please only call NHS 24 if your GP is closed and you cannot wait until they reopen.

Will my information be kept confidential?

All calls to 111 are confidential and NHS 24 follows the same confidentiality guidelines as the rest of the NHS. All calls are recorded for patient safety.

When you call 111, unless you state to the contrary, we'll assume that you're happy for us to pass on any information to a relevant part of the NHS. Your doctor will know that you've contacted NHS 24 unless you tell the call handler that you refuse consent to share this information with your GP. This is so that medical records are kept up to date.

Will I be speaking to a medical expert?

NHS 24 are experts in telephone assessment and linking people to health and care information and advice.

If necessary, your call will be transferred to a Community Hub, which will be staffed by medical staff from across the healthcare system, working together to ensure you get the best possible advice at the right time.

If those staff think you need to physically see a medical expert, you will be given an appointment at your local Assessment Centre.

What happens if I am passed on to the local Community Hub?

You will speak on the phone to a trained clinician who will ask you some questions about your COVID-19 symptoms and concerns.

Either they will assess that you are able to continue to self-isolate at home and will answer your questions, or they will refer you to your local Assessment Centre. If they do this you will be given an appointment time to attend in person. If you are housebound, or genuinely unable to attend in person arrangements to have you seen will be made.

What can I expect at local Assessment centre?

Each Assessment Centre will be different, but generally speaking, the following should be indicative of what you can expect.

Please only arrive at the agreed time for your appointment. The Community Hub will advise you on how to access the assessment centre. Once you arrive, you will go to a waiting room, where you will either be by yourself, or a safe distance from other patients waiting in the room. You will then be seen by a clinician. They will likely be wearing a mask and gloves as a precaution but this does not mean that you have Covid-19. You may be asked to wear a surgical face mask, to help prevent spread of coughs and sneezes.

They will assess you and your symptoms and create a treatment plan for you. If you need to go to hospital they will arrange this, otherwise you will be sent home with any medication you need (or a prescription) and your treatment plan.

Can I get a Covid-19 test at an Assessment Centre?

We are not currently routinely testing everyone who has symptoms. By working on the assumption that you have Covid-19 we can plan your care more quickly.

Will the Assessment Centre have wheelchair access?

Each local Assessment Centre will be different, however we expect that they will have wheelchair access where possible. If you require any special access or have other special circumstances please let your clinician know when you are speaking to them on the phone in the Hub.

What happens if I am too ill to make it to the centre?

Local Health Boards will implement local plans. However, we are working with colleagues to arrange transport for those who can't get to Assessment Centres, or home visits by an appropriate clinician if necessary.

What do I do with transport?

If you are able to safely get yourself to the Assessment Centre by car (either driving or by getting a lift from a friend or family member), please do so. Please do not use

public transport. Otherwise, when speaking to the Community Hub, please let them know if you need additional support and they will help you based on local protocols for moving patients.

Why are we having a single point of entry for all Covid-19 symptoms?

Due to the very large numbers of people trying to seek advice, it's important that people can do this quickly and easily. That is why we have created this one process for anyone who has COVID-19 symptoms and needs additional support or advice. If this is you – you can call NHS 24 on 111 any time, day or night, 24/7 and they will help you. Remember – if you have symptoms and think you can manage your care at home, don't phone NHS 24 – the NHS Inform website has lots of information that can help you.

If you do not have any COVID-19 symptoms, please only call NHS 24 if your GP is closed and you cannot wait until they reopen.

Will there be call handlers I can speak to in another language?

If English isn't your first or preferred language you can still use our 111 service. NHS 24 uses the interpretation service, Language Line, to support callers who cannot, or prefer not to, speak English.

Language Line is private, confidential and free to use.

To use Language Line:

Phone NHS 24 on 111

Tell the call handler that you need an interpreter

Tell the call handler the name of your preferred language

Once you're connected to an interpreter you'll have a three way conversation with NHS 24 to explain the problem in your language and get the help you need.

Can I phone on behalf of a friend or family member?

You can call NHS 24 on behalf of someone else – for example, if you are a carer for a child, elderly relative or a neighbour – if they cannot speak to us themselves.

Is there a textphone system available for people who need to use them?

Yes. If you have difficulties hearing or communicating you can call NHS 24's 111 service (18001 111) or NHS inform (18001 0800 22 44 88) on a textphone.

If you're deaf but want to use the phone service you can use the [Scotland BSL interpreting video relay service](#). This service is available 24/7.

What happens if NHS 24 is busy?

At busy times you may experience a wait for your call to be answered. Please do not hang up and redial, stay on the line and NHS 24 will answer your call. Remember there is lots of information on www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

Remember, you can call again at any time if you are still worried or your symptoms worsen. If you think someone's life is in danger and you need an ambulance, always dial 999.

You should only call 111 during the day if you are worried about COVID-19 symptoms. For anything else that's not COVID related, you should still phone your GP surgery. If your surgery is closed, phone 111.

What should I speak to my GP about?

Your GP remains there to help you with any medical condition or concern you have, that isn't COVID-19 related.

If you wish to speak to someone about a non-COVID-19 medical concern then phone your GP. If your GP surgery is closed for the day and your concern cannot wait, you can still call NHS 24 on 111.

If you are speaking to your GP about a non-COVID-19 issue but think you might also have COVID-19 please let your GP know and don't go to your practice.

Please remember that all medical services are extremely busy at this time – it may be possible for you to self-medicate – see [NHS inform](#) for more info.

If I need a fitnote, will I get one as part of this process or do I need to speak to my GP?

You do not need to ask your GP. [Click here](#) for information on how to download a fit note.