

17 March 2020

For general practice in Kent and Medway: COVID-19 update 1.

Please make sure the content of this update is **shared, discussed and actioned** within your practice.

NB The information is up to date when sent out but it is always important to check that this reflects the most recent national guidance. As we were finalising this we received this letter from the NHS:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/next-steps-on-nhs-response-to-covid-19-letter-from-simon-stevens-and-amanda-pritchard/>

COVID-19 updates and your questions

We are aware of the difficulties that general practice is facing in managing the response to COVID-19 pandemic. To help mitigate this, the Kent and Medway CCGs will now be sending a twice weekly COVID-19 update to general practice across Kent and Medway. This update will clarify national guidelines/processes when needed but will primarily focus on the local response. There may also be urgent updates issued beyond the Tuesday and Thursday bulletins, but we will try to keep these to a minimum.

We will send you tomorrow the generic email account to send enquiries relating to the content of this and future updates.

National guidance

Current NHS advice to primary care can be found here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/>

There are links from here to a variety of detailed guidance. All practices should ensure that they follow the published national guidance. Remember the national guidance will be updated continually so it is important to check it regularly.

NHS111

It is important to note that NHS111 are not advising any patients with COVID-19 symptoms to attend their surgery. If patients ignore this advice please ask them to return home and self-isolate and follow advice from NHS111. Please email kentcft.covid19km@nhs.net details of any patients who say they have been directed to attend by NHS111 so we can check call records to confirm they were given the correct advice.

Patients who contact NHS111 without COVID-19 symptoms will be directed to telephone their surgery to seek advice. Again if someone does visit your surgery

without an appointment please ask them to leave the surgery and telephone you for advice.

Advice about managing access to surgeries

To limit the number of patients visiting the surgery:

- all practices should aim to be able to offer appointments remotely - this may be over the phone, on-line consultation/symptom assessment, or video consultations (see below for update about IT provision)
- all face-to-face appointments should be triaged first to make sure the patient does not present at the surgery with a fever or new continuous cough

Please do not redirect symptomatic patients.

Practices should not direct patients with COVID-19 symptoms to primary care hubs or other walk-in/urgent care services/emergency departments. To avoid possibility of spreading the virus, suspected COVID-19 patients should be told to self-isolate and seek further advice through NHS111 online service: <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>.

Telephone and website messages

All practices without exception should update phone and online booking messages with the following text.

Telephone voicemail message

- Please do not book a GP appointment or attend your GP practice if you, or anyone in your household, have symptoms associated with coronavirus including a new continuous cough or a high temperature.
- If you have symptoms associated with coronavirus including a new continuous cough and a high temperature, you are advised to stay at home for 7 days. If you live with other people, they should also stay at home for at least 14 days, to avoid spreading the infection outside the home.
- If your symptoms are serious, or get worse, NHS 111 has an online coronavirus service that can tell you if you need further medical help and advise you what to do.
- Only call 111 direct if you are advised to do so by the online service or cannot go online.
- For the latest coronavirus advice please visit www.nhs.uk/coronavirus.

Information for online booking processes

- If you have symptoms associated with coronavirus including a new continuous cough and a high temperature, you are advised to stay at home for 7 days. Do not book a GP appointment or attend your GP practice. If you live with other people, they should also stay at home for at least 14 days, to avoid spreading the infection outside the home.

- If your symptoms are serious, or get worse, NHS 111 has an [online coronavirus service](#) that can tell you if you need further medical help and advise you what to do.
- Only call 111 direct if you are advised to do so by the online service or cannot go online.
- For the latest COVID-19 advice please visit www.nhs.uk/coronavirus.

Managing demand at practice level – focus on essential services

The CCGs are working closely with the LMC to agree how general practice can make sure their efforts are focused on supporting patients through the pandemic. The CCGs are therefore asking all practices to:

- maintain essential and necessary services, however commissioned (GMS DES LCS)
- core GMS work must be continued
- reduce / cease 'non-essential' work - by this we mean ensuring things that can be stopped are stopped; not transferred to another provider
- immediately, where resources allow, move to doing as much COVID-19 risk mitigation clinical work as possible.

For COVID-19 risk mitigation we recommend each practice does the following:

- review and update your current Practice Business Continuity Plan (BCP)
- make contact with your buddy practice, as noted in your BCP
- ensure your MHRA CAS email is monitored daily
- consider how you can maximise remote working of both clinical and administrative staff
- consider how your provision of care will continue with fewer staff – the cessation of LCS related workload will contribute to this
- maintain records of staff sickness so they can be provided when requested to ascertain the impact on general practice

Funding of locally commissioned services and incentive schemes

We will provide further detail (once agreed with the LMC) but please be assured that funding for all primary care services will continue to be paid regularly as normal. Money will keep flowing to you at expected rates. We do ask that staff currently in post (unless leaving for unrelated reasons) are retained, and that you should continue to pay any staff who are unable to work for any COVID-19 related reasons.

The CCGs recognise that there may be additional costs incurred, specifically related to workforce and cleaning requirements, and ask all practices to keep a record of any additional reasonable costs incurred directly as a result of the current situation.

We would not expect any significant costs to be incurred without discussion and agreement with the CCG if reimbursement is sought.

QOF Protection:

- CCGs will offer a financial protection of QOF income for year 2019-20 so practices are not disadvantaged by the situation with COVID-19
- CCGs will ensure that the practices overall QOF income per point is not lower than the previous year (2018-19)

COVID-19 Home Management Service

COVID-19 Home Management Services are being developed at pace. Details of this service will be shared with you as soon as possible.

Infection prevention and control

The latest guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>

PPE

In recognition that distribution issues are being reported the latest NHS letter (17 March) provides a dedicated line for you if you are experiencing problems:

- Tel: 0800 915 9964 / 0191 283 6543
- Email: supplydisruptionservice@nhsbsa.nhs.uk

Practice cleaning

The latest guidance on disinfecting areas potentially contaminated with COVID-19 is here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wn-cov-guidance-for-primary-care/wn-cov-interim-guidance-for-primary-care> .

GP IT

We are working on a range of IT related support for practices. An initial summary is below and more details will follow in the future briefings with timescales.

Laptops for clinical staff to work remotely

Our aim is to provide additional laptops to all practices so clinical staff can access clinical systems remotely. Orders are being place on the basis of 1 laptop per 2,000 patients. Laptops will include hardware and software to support video conferencing and secure access to clinical system. We are also looking into secure remote access that would allow clinicians to use personal mobile devices to access clinical systems.

iPlato text messaging

All CCGs are signed up to iPlato which provides text messaging facilities for practices. The CCGs 'pre-buy' credits for messages and allocate these to practices, however some practices have run out of messages so we will be sharing the remaining credits across all practices. This will give each practice an allocation of 1.64 credits per patient. These credits should only be used for messages to individual patients, not for bulk messaging to large cohorts of patients.

Some practices have also signed up to the AccuRx messaging service or have other SMS services, practices should continue to use these as normal.

Video Consultation

There are a number of products that support this NHS England have reached contractual agreements with.

- EMIS – product integrated into the EMIS Web clinical applications
- AccuRx – standalone product that can be used by either Vision or EMIS practices and can work on clinicians mobile phones

Clinicians should note that video conferencing will place a load on HSCN/broadband connections.

Online triage

Online triage tools guide the patient through a diagnosis decision tree. eConsult (East Kent) and Doctorlink (West Kent, DGS, Swale and Medway) are being deployed to provide this service.

We acknowledge this is a difficult time for all those staff working in primary care and we would like to thank you for all of your hard work and dedication in this challenging time.

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