**Health service messages: November COVID-19 national lockdown**

**Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership**

**Correct as of 12 November 2020**

**General**

On Thursday 5 November, England will enter a second period of tighter national restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. During this four week, second ‘lockdown’ all members of the public are asked stay at home, avoid meeting people outside of your household or bubble and to avoid unnecessary travel. However, there are important exceptions to this including:

* Collecting medication
* Attending medical appointments
* Medical emergencies

NHS services will remain open and you can leave your home to visit them. It is vital that anyone who thinks they need any kind of medical care comes forward and seeks help. For your safety, you may be asked to contact a service by phone or email before attending in person. The NHS is still here for you.

Do not enter any healthcare premises if you, or someone you live with, has symptoms of COVID-19. You (or the person you live with) will need to book a test and all members of your household must isolate at home while you wait for the results. If your test is positive, you must isolate at home for 10 days from when your symptoms first started. If someone you live with tests positive, you must isolate at home for 14 days in case you develop symptoms. You can still contact health services, such as 111 or your GP practice, by phone or online while you are isolating.

**Primary care**

All primary care services (GP practices, dental practices, pharmacies and optometry providers) will remain open during lockdown to treat patients, offering care which is safe, necessary and prioritised on the basis of clinical need.

**General practice**

* Your GP practice is still here for you. For your safety, you will need to contact them by phone or online to begin with so they can decide if a face to face appointment is needed.
* GP practices currently have reduced capacity for face to face appointments due to additional PPE requirements and infection prevention and control measures. For this reason, practices are now doing more appointments by phone or video to help patients access the help they need.
* Your GP can often help with a diagnosis, prescription or referral to a specialist or other service by phone.
* Don’t forget to put on your face covering before entering your GP practice – unless you’re exempt. Staff will be wearing masks or visors, or they may be sitting behind a screen.
* When your practice is closed you can call 111 or go to <https://111.nhs.uk/> for help and advice.
* The flu vaccine is a safe and effective way of protecting against flu this winter. It’s still safe for you and other family members, including children, to have their flu vaccine.
* Cervical screening is one of the best ways to protect yourself against cervical cancer. If you have an appointment booked, then it’s still safe to attend.
* One of the best ways to protect your child against serious diseases like measles, rubella, tetanus and meningitis is through immunisation. Routine immunisations for babies and young children are continuing as normal and it’s safe to attend.

**Community pharmacy**

* Things may be a little different but your local pharmacy is still there for you.
* Your local pharmacy may be varying its opening hours at the moment. Give them a call to check before you leave home.
* Your local pharmacy can provide help and advice over the phone – not just face to face.
* Don’t forget to put on your face covering before entering your local pharmacy – unless you’re exempt. Staff will be wearing masks or visors, or standing behind a screen.
* The flu vaccine is a safe and effective way of protecting against flu this winter – and it’s available at local community pharmacies. It’s still safe for you and other family members to have your flu vaccine

**Dentistry**

* In Greater Manchester all dental practices have resumed face to face care, prioritising patients with urgent dental needs whilst ensuring the safety of patients and staff.
* Dental practices are currently working at a reduced capacity due to additional PPE requirements and infection prevention and control measures. This is likely to affect the range of services and the number of appointments being offered at your practice. Services may not be fully restored for some time.
* Routine check-ups and other non-urgent care not be available for some time.
* For some specific dental treatments, your dentist may need to be refer you to an urgent dental centre.
* Call your dental practice in the first instance rather than going there in person unless you have a booked appointment. They can assess you over the phone, offer advice, medication or a face to face appointment if this is needed.
* If you’re in pain or have an urgent dental problem, please phone your usual dental practice. If you do not have a regular dentist, or your practice is closed, please contact the Greater Manchester dental helpline on 0333 332 3800.

**Opticians**

* High street opticians are remaining open during the national lockdown.
* Urgent and essential eye care services are available, and you should still attend eye care appointments if they're going ahead and if you’re well.
* If you need urgent eye care and you don’t have a regular optician, contact NHS 111.

**Hospital – planned**

* The NHS is still here for you. If you have a routine appointment, make sure you keep it, unless recommended otherwise by your doctor.
* If you are told to go to hospital for a routine appointment, then the NHS has measures in place to make sure that it safe for you to do so.
* If you need to be admitted to hospital, you will be cared for in a low risk area and all patients who are admitted to this area will have had a negative swab test, like you.
* In Greater Manchester our hospitals are working together to ensure the best and safest care for our patients.
* Lots of outpatient appointments are being done differently at the moment due to COVID-19. For your safety, you may be asked to speak to a doctor or the phone or even by video instead of going to the hospital. If you’re concerned that you may struggle with a remote appointment, perhaps due to a disability or IT difficulties, please let the hospital know so that alternative arrangements can be made.
* Breast screening aims to find breast cancer so women have a better chance of survival. Breast cancer screening services are now up and running again. If you have an appointment booked it’s still safe to attend.
* The NHS in Greater Manchester will come under be increasing pressure this winter due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, hospitals may need to make the difficult choice of prioritising those patients who need urgent or emergency care and treatment. Sadly, this may mean **pausing** some planned surgery or outpatient appointments. Your hospital will inform you of any changes. Please assume that your appointment or procedure if going ahead unless you are told otherwise by the hospital.

**Pressures and pausing activity**

* We have seen significant increases in Covid-19 admissions and NHS services across the country are under a huge amount of pressure.
* We’ve seen a rapid rise in the number of hospital patients throughout October. Infection rates are rising among older people and this is translating to higher hospital admissions.
* Today we have 1204 patients in our hospital beds in Greater Manchester who have tested positive for COVID-19, including 130 in intensive care. This means we have more COVID-19 patients in our hospitals now than at the peak of the pandemic in mid-April *(data to be updated from Tableau)*
* Staff in our hospitals and across the NHS have worked tirelessly to try to maintain services and deliver the highest quality of healthcare to local people.
* We still continue to treat nearly 9,000 cancer patients a week in Greater Manchester. Since wave 1 we have increased our number of operations and procedures (non cancer) to nearly 10,000 per week.
* Despite these efforts it is now necessary to pause non-urgent work to ensure we are in a position to expand critical care facilities, whilst maintaining cancer and other urgent care.
* We’ve been developing flexibility and resilience in the system, training extra staff to provide certain types of critical care. Staffing ratios are different for this level of care which is why we have needed to redeploy of our staff that would normally work on non urgent and routine procedures.
* We know that it will be very frustrating for people to have their appointments postponed particularly those people who have already waited a long time. Please bear with us. As with wave one the support of the public is critical to tackling the virus.
* We continue to do all we can to treat and care for people in Greater Manchester though we would stress that everyone has a role to play. It’s essential that we all follow the guidance – washing our hands regularly, maintaining social distancing and wearing face coverings when needed. If we are to slow the spread of the virus, it is essential that we all work together to protect ourselves and our communities.
* We know many people waiting for treatment will be disappointed or worried, and we will be contacting everyone affected as soon as possible

**Maternity**

* If you are pregnant, it is crucial that you still attend your antenatal appointments and continue to seek advice from your midwife or maternity team to ensure you have a safe and healthy pregnancy.
* If you are worried about your health or the health of your unborn baby, please do not hesitate to contact your midwife or maternity team.
* Women of a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background may be at higher risk of complications of coronavirus. Maternity services have been asked to take extra precautions to keep women at greatest risk safe and everyone should seek advice without delay if they are concerned about their or their baby’s health.
* Midwives have worked hard to make sure you still have a personal and safe maternity experience during this time, but some services will need to adapt. This could mean having telephone or video consultations or attending your antenatal appointments in a different setting. Your midwife will have more details about what is happening in your area.
* If you’re due to see your midwife, or something just doesn’t feel right, your NHS is here to see you, safely.

**Cancer**

* If you’ve had unexplained blood that doesn’t come from an obvious injury (such as blood in your poo or pee), an unexplained lump, weight loss which feels significant to you or an unexplained pain that lasts three weeks or more, it could be a sign of cancer.
* It’s probably nothing serious, but finding cancer early makes it more treatable, so just speak to your GP. Your NHS is here to see you, safely.

**Endoscopy**

* If you’ve got a routine appointment for an endoscopy, and your symptoms worsen, contact your hospital endoscopy team as soon as possible for help and advice.
* Diagnostic services including endoscopy will not be paused so attendance is essential to your care if you receive an appointment.
* If you’ve been referred for an urgent endoscopy by your doctor, it’s really important you attend. If it is cancer, the earlier it is diagnosed the easier it is to treat.

**Mental health**

**General - preventative**

* During lockdown it is particularly important for everyone to take care of their mental health and wellbeing and support those around them.
* This is a difficult time and even those who have not previously experienced any mental health problems may struggle.
* Simple things like eating a healthy balanced diet and getting enough sleep can mean you’re less susceptible to problems with anxiety, low mood and even depression.
* There are five straightforward steps you can take to improve your mental health and wellbeing – even during lockdown (5 ways to wellbeing)

1. Connect with other people   
   (For example, eat a meal or play a game with other members of your household, meet someone you don’t live with for a walk in the park, or arrange a video call with a friend who lives further away).
2. Be physically active
3. Learn new skills
4. Give to others – this can be small acts of kindness to those around you or bigger gestures like volunteering in your community
5. Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness) - to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you

**Services**

* Mental health services are still there for you. Things may just be a little different right now with more telephone and video appointments for screening, assessment, support and therapy.
* Your GP can advise on helpful treatments and help you to access mental health services. can They can still refer you for counselling or other talking therapies if that’s the right thing for you. You may be able to refer yourself to some services.
* If you have an appointment with a specialist mental health service, make sure you keep it, unless recommended otherwise by your doctor. If you need medication or to be admitted to hospital - this is still available.
* If you’re feeling low, anxious or depressed your GP practice is still there for you. For your safety, you will need to contact them by phone or online.
* There are now a range of online mental health resources available to Greater Manchester residents to provide extra help and support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
* Feeling worried or stressed in a lockdown is normal. If you're 11-18 you can access free and anonymous online counselling and emotional support via Kooth ([www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)).
* Whatever you are going through, you don’t have to face it alone. Shout offers free, 24/7, confidential mental health support. If you’re struggling, text SHOUT to 85258.
* If you’re feeling stressed, anxious or struggling to sleep, the online cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) programmes available on Silver Cloud might help. (<https://gm.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/>)
* If you need help for a mental health crisis, emergency or breakdown, you should get immediate expert advice and assessment. Support is available, even if services seem busy at the moment because of coronavirus.
* If you need urgent mental health support in a crisis or emergency and you’re not sure where to turn you can call NHS 111.
* If you've been given a crisis line number to use in a mental health emergency, you should use it if you need to. Support is still available during lockdown.
* If you’re a student at a university in Greater Manchester you can access counselling and wellbeing services at your university and if needed they can also refer you to the Greater Manchester Universities Student Mental Health Service.

NB: Digital assets highlighting mental health support available during lockdown are available to download: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/k9jkz84p1qei6ba/AAA-gWWfjTDF65qmeZejGha2a?dl=0>.

Additional assets will soon be available looking at digital support available as part of an upcoming mental health campaign.

**Hospital – emergency**

* Your local emergency department (A&E) is still here for you when you need it. Our hospitals are currently under increasing pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic so please take care to only go to the emergency department when you really need to.
* We are making changes to emergency departments which will mean patients are assessed on arrival at the hospital and directed to the most appropriate department or service for their needs. This may include referral back to a community-based service or your own GP.
* If you’re not sure what to do, NHS 111 is still there for you. Go to 111.nhs.uk or call 111 to be directed to the most appropriate place for your care.
* NHS 111 Online is a really useful online resource that provides; a symptom checker, advice and information on local services and advice and information on COVID 19.
* NHS 111 is available for help and advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and staff can book an appointment for you with a wide range of local services
* A medical emergency is still a medical emergency. If someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk call 999. Medical emergencies can include:
  + loss of consciousness
  + an acute confused state
  + fits that are not stopping
  + severe chest pain
  + severe breathing difficulties
  + severe bleeding that can’t be stopped
  + severe allergic reactions
  + severe burns or scalds
* Call 999 immediately if you think you or someone else is having a heart attack or stroke.
* If it's not a life-threatening emergency and you or the person you're with does not need immediate medical attention, please consider other options. The ambulance service is currently coming under increased pressures so only call 999 if you really need to.

**Web/bulletin copy**

**Primary care services open for business**

All primary care services (GP practices, dental practices, pharmacies and optometry providers) remain open during the current national lockdown and people can continue to access them as they have through the pandemic.

Rising Covid infections are having an impact on all NHS services, including primary care. This means that the services you need may be busier than usual. Staff are working hard to provide services and care for patients, so people are asked to respect them and be patient.

Here’s what to expect:

General practice

For your safety, you will need to contact your practice by phone or online to begin with. You will be assessed and offered a phone or video appointment, or a face to face appointment if you need one.

The majority of common conditions can be assessed and diagnosed by your doctor by telephone or video consultation. They are experienced and skilled in doing this. Using technology like this will help to protect you, your family and loved ones - and GP practice staff from the potential risk of the virus.

Dental care

Call your dental practice in the first instance rather than going there in person unless you have a booked appointment. They can assess you over the phone, offer advice, medication or a face to face appointment if this is needed.

Dental practices are prioritising patients with urgent dental needs whilst ensuring the safety of patients and staff. For some specific dental treatments, your dentist may need to be refer you to an urgent dental centre.

If you do not have a regular dentist, you can find one by going to: [www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist)

Pharmacy

Things may be a little different but your local pharmacy is still here for you. Your local pharmacy can provide help and advice over the phone – not just face to face. Find your nearest pharmacy at <https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/find-a-pharmacy/>

Optometry

Urgent and essential eye care services are available and you should still attend eye care appointments if they're going ahead and if you’re well. If you need urgent eye care and you don’t have a regular optician, contact NHS 111.