

Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum Stakeholder Update

9 April 2020

**A message from Darryl Keen, Director of Community Protection,
Chief Fire Officer and Chair of the strategic coordination group of the
Local Resilience Forum.**



Dear stakeholder,

This is the third update from Hertfordshire's Local Resilience Forum, a multi-agency partnership of local public services working to coordinate our approach to COVID-19.

Essential NHS services remain available to everyone who needs them

The vast majority of the public in Hertfordshire are protecting themselves and others from coronavirus by staying at home, in line with government guidelines. However, essential NHS services are still available for people who need them. No-one should put off contacting their GP practice or dentist if they are concerned about their general health or have a worrying symptom which needs checking out.

Hertfordshire's GP practices have put in place telephone and video appointments, and when it's necessary, face-to-face appointments can still be carried out with a GP or nurse in a setting that is safe for both patients and staff. Please use your own networks to spread this important message. Some primary care leaders have reported that for example they are not seeing the number of children or hearing from the number of adults with cancer symptoms that they would expect in normal circumstances, with patients fearful of attending GP surgeries.

Those who are concerned that they have COVID-19 symptoms should go to the website 111.nhs.uk/service/COVID-19 to check out their symptoms and get advice and information about what to do next.

Accessing GP and pharmacy services over the Easter weekend

GP services will be available on Good Friday and Easter Monday (10 and 13 April) with the majority of practices open. Normal evening and extended access arrangements will remain in place for the rest of the Easter weekend. Residents should check with their own GP practice for details of opening times over the Easter weekend.

Pharmacies will open between 2pm and 5pm on Good Friday and Easter Monday (10 and 13 April) with normal hours on Saturday 11 April.

West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust

Following the critical incident at Watford General Hospital last Saturday 4 April, efforts continue to boost the hospital's oxygen capacity and explore mobile supplies.

In the meantime, oxygen usage – which has doubled over recent weeks – is being monitored very closely.

Hertfordshire Constabulary and the East of England Ambulance Service Trust, together with the Lister, Papworth and Addenbrooke's hospitals (which all accepted transferred patients) provided steadfast support during the incident.

The trust is caring for around 200 patients who are confirmed to have COVID-19 or are awaiting results. In addition, its respiratory team is supporting patients at home through a virtual hospital model using digital technology to make secure video calls to patients. More than 400 patients have been seen over the last three weeks; it's estimated that at any one time, 14 more patients might need beds in the hospital if they were not being monitored through the virtual hospital.

Staff testing for COVID-19 has begun and is phased, with clinical staff from Intensive Treatment Unit (ITU) and Emergency Department (ED) being tested first.

East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust (ENHT)

ENHT is currently caring for 65 patients with confirmed COVID-19 in the hospital. The trust has prepared well to care for patients with COVID-19, and for those with other needs without COVID-19. Many changes have been focused at the Lister as our main receiving hospital for COVID-19 patients, including:

- a new triage system for patients arriving at the emergency department.
- ward and area moves to allow for appropriate cohorting of COVID-19 and non COVID-19 patients.
- cancer surgery moving to independent partner hospitals.

Many other changes have taken place across the trust, namely:

- Mount Vernon Cancer Centre has set up a patient advice line, are carrying out home pharmacy deliveries, and have relocated the brachytherapy service.
- The Urgent Care Centre at Welwyn Garden City's New QEII Hospital has increased staffing to treat people with minor injuries who would previously have visited the Lister.
- Virtual and phone appointments are taking place across the trust.

Testing for healthcare staff

Testing for COVID-19 is already underway for priority staff in hospitals and the ambulance service. We are rolling out a huge testing programme across health services to increase the number of staff who are available to work.

We're seeing considerable pressures on the health system due to high numbers of staff being absent with suggestive COVID-19 symptoms or self-isolating for 14 days due to a household member having symptoms. Testing symptomatic employees and household members will allow people to return to work if they are clear of COVID-19. Hertfordshire Community Trust and Central London Community Healthcare Trust are providing this testing in local centres and significant additional laboratory capacity is in place to process the results. Hertfordshire Urgent Care is doing the staff booking and follow-up. The next wave of testing will be extended to include the mental health and community healthcare workforce and GPs.

Residential care homes

Hertfordshire County Council is temporarily re-opening two care homes – Nevetts in Buntingford and The Fairway in Oxhey – to provide additional bedded capacity to the local NHS for COVID-19 patients. These buildings will have been brought back from closure to operation within three weeks and provide 85 beds.

The council has also worked with other local care home providers to secure over 250 additional residential and nursing home beds countywide for onward discharge from hospital or short-stay in the case of family carer arrangements breaking down. These will be funded by the pooled grant with the local NHS.

Support for people who are ‘shielding’

Hertfordshire County Council is coordinating support for people who for health reasons are ‘shielding’ for 12 weeks, as well as others that need extra help in the community – providing food and medication, advice and support. This is being coordinated through the HertsHelp information and advice service.

The council is also managing requests for food to support other settings, including hostels and foodbanks, which are experiencing a significant increase in demand. To date, over 6,000 volunteers have come forward and 2,000 have already been deployed, supporting the public to get the food and prescription medicines they need, and keeping in contact with those who are at risk of becoming lonely or isolated.

Emergency services update

Your blue light services remain ready to respond to emergencies in the county 24/7 – as always.

Mutual aid training has begun, with some firefighters being trained to work with ambulance crews. In policing, resources remain in a good position with our volunteer Special Constabulary offering a strong reserve if needed.

While the long Easter weekend is usually a time for families and friends to get together, Hertfordshire Constabulary will continue to ask people to respect the social distancing guidelines. You may see police officers in parks and open spaces, checking that everyone is taking their daily exercise responsibly.

If you are concerned that you have seen a gathering which contravenes the guidance, we would encourage you to contact us using [online reporting](#) methods. This will help to relieve some of the pressure on our emergency lines and resources, and allow for a quicker response to urgent 999 calls.

Nationally we know that incidents of domestic abuse are likely to rise as the lockdown continues. Please share our social media messages as we ask victims to still call 999 if in immediate danger and, if unable to speak, to alert us silently by dialing 999 then pressing 55.

District and borough council update

Changes to waste and recycling services and the closure of car parks in response to poor social distancing remain an ongoing challenge across the district and borough councils. Some districts and boroughs have distributed COVID-19 information leaflets to all homes as business-focused communications to ensure local businesses are accessing necessary support.

A significant amount of communications is being planned to keep communities informed and reassured.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

One of our Local Resilience Forum's sub-groups is reviewing the availability and supply of PPE for all health and care providers, including schools and pharmacies, to ensure that it is being distributed appropriately. Emergency packs have been issued to home care and residential care providers and stock received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will be shared out to meet the immediate needs of a number of organisations in the coming days.

Public Health at Hertfordshire County Council is consolidating PPE usage guidance into a single, easily accessible format with guidance being developed regarding disposal. We are currently finalising a process for managing a surge of offers from local businesses and other organisations to manufacture PPE and will be able to share contact details for this soon.

We need you

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting individuals and communities in many different ways. If you become aware of someone who needs support and you're not sure how best to help them, please refer them to the HertsHelp advice and information service. Either call 0300 123 4040, text hertshelp to 81025, minicom 0300 456 2364 or [email info@hertshelp.net](mailto:info@hertshelp.net)

As a local stakeholder with your own community networks and influence, we need your help to get across the lifesaving '**Stay Home, Save Lives, Protect the NHS**' message to the public in your area. Please follow @NHSuk and @[GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) on twitter and share their public messages.

Thank you.