

Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum - stakeholder update

1 May 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 sixth update from Hertfordshire's Local Resilience Forum, a multi-agency partnership of local public services which is working to coordinate our approach to COVID-19.



On Tuesday, all health and care organisations in Hertfordshire respected the minute's silence to mark International Workers' Memorial Day and honour health and social care workers who have lost their lives due to coronavirus. The silence was a timely reminder of the importance of our work here in the county to tackle both the direct and indirect victims of the global pandemic.

More COVID-19 drive-through test sites now available in Hertfordshire

Drive-through COVID-19 testing is now available in Hertfordshire on a weekly basis. The pop-up sites in Hertford (Saturdays), Watford (Sundays) and Stevenage (Mondays) have been commissioned by local NHS organisations and are supported by the military. Testing at each site will open at 10am and run until 4pm.

The tests are only effective if people are swabbed in the first three days of having suspected coronavirus symptoms. They cannot detect whether somebody has had coronavirus in the past.

Testing for coronavirus will enable essential workers who test negative to return to work more promptly and helps scientists to understand how the virus is spreading. For more information about who can have a test and how to book one, go to www.gov.uk/coronavirus. Please note that the booking system will only show you details of test locations which are available in the following 24hrs.

Supporting our residential and nursing home staff and residents through COVID-19

Very sadly, we continue to see a rise in the number of deaths of care home residents – both in hospital and in care homes themselves. Several Hertfordshire care homes have reported serious outbreaks and the county council's Adult Care Services team is working on providing area-specific information to elected members and MPs. The county council and Hertfordshire's NHS organisations are working closely to coordinate their efforts to support homes with advice on infection control and staff swabbing. There has been a welcome increase in the number of care home residents and staff who are being swabbed by the Hertfordshire -based health organisation Herts Urgent Care.

Both of the county's clinical commissioning groups have invested in additional diagnostic equipment for care homes, enabling care home staff to take basic observations on their residents and helping them to identify

more quickly if a resident becomes unwell. The additional information this equipment provides will also support NHS staff to build a more detailed picture of each person's medical needs.

Within the next week, two care homes will re-open, 'Nevetts' in Buntingford and 'The Fairway' in Oxhey. These homes will help to provide additional capacity for patients who need extra support to recover from COVID-19.

The county council's provider 'hub' is also dealing with a lot of queries from organisations concerned about the quality, cost, use and supply of PPE, as well as COVID-19 testing and financial concerns. Wellbeing resources have been put in place by the county council, supporting care staff facing difficult circumstances.

Seeking help for cancer symptoms

This week NHS England's national clinical director for cancer has urged people not to hesitate to get worrying symptoms checked out, as new research revealed that nearly half of the public have concerns about seeking medical help during the coronavirus pandemic. Detecting cancer early gives the best chance of successful treatment, so it's incredibly important that early possible cancer symptoms are investigated so that people's minds can be put at rest, or treatment started as soon as possible.

Here in Hertfordshire, NHS staff have worked hard to make sure people can get cancer checks and treatment safely and in COVID-free areas. Online consultations mean people do not necessarily need to go to GP surgeries for appointments, while COVID-free treatment hubs in NHS and private hospitals have been established. If you know of family members or friends who are worried about symptoms that might be caused by cancer, please ask them to pick up the phone to their GP.

Urgent dental hubs now up and running

Hoddesdon, Hemel Hempstead and Rickmansworth have now been confirmed as the locations for Hertfordshire's urgent dental treatment hubs. As patients need to be assessed before they can book an appointment, people need to contact their dentist practice in the first instance. If their dentist agrees that they need to be examined, they will refer them to the urgent triage service which will arrange an appointment at a nearby hub. People who do not have a regular dentist are advised to use the NHS 111 online service for advice and support: www.111.nhs.uk

Policing update

Officers are on patrol as usual in parks and open spaces around the county. Their role there is primarily public safety, as they work to reduce the opportunities for the virus to spread. Officers will always seek to encourage compliance with the regulations, but where necessary for the benefit of the wider public, they will take enforcement action if required.

If you are concerned that you have seen a gathering which contravenes the guidance, please contact the police using online reporting methods. This will help to relieve some of the pressure on emergency lines and resources, and allow for a quicker response to urgent 999 calls. Hertfordshire Constabulary really appreciates your co-operation and would like to thank everyone for their support so far.

To report a COVID-19 related crime, such as a mass gathering, please ensure that you use the online methods of reporting where possible, which can be found at herts.police.uk/contact or herts.police.uk/report

Additional community care services

Central London Community NHS Trust has increased the scope of the community treatment unit at St Albans City Hospital to be able to provide additional treatments for patients, and virtual patient appointments have continued. The trust continues to deliver all essential and urgent services in line with national guidance.

Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust has now conducted over 1,000 patient appointments via video consultation and has increased the number of GPs in its East and North Referral Hub in Stevenage to support community and care home teams. Several patients receiving treatment for COVID-19 have now also been successfully discharged from its inpatient units.

Pharmacy support for end of life care

In response to additional demand for end of life medicines, new guidance published by the Department of Health and Social Care supports care home and hospice providers and will help to ensure that people who live in care homes or hospices get the medicines they need promptly in their hour of need.

Hertfordshire's two clinical commissioning groups have also been asked to work with a variety of health organisations to support rapid access to appropriate end of life medicines for patients. Arrangements have been made with a number of community pharmacies, community trusts and out-of-hours GP services to safely and legally store additional stocks of medicines needed rapidly when people reach the end of their lives.

Community pharmacies have worked exceptionally hard to respond and participate in providing these services at short notice and this is appreciated by the whole health and care system.

East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust

Over the next six weeks, East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust will begin to step up their non-COVID urgent services, with a focus on infection prevention and control. The trust will also be working with local partners and regional colleagues to make decisions about when to restore some non-urgent treatments and care. All plans will take into account the availability of medicines, PPE, blood and other supplies, and care will be taken to ensure that the capacity remains to deal with any future surge in either COVID-19 or non-COVID-19 demand.

Staff are being encouraged to take the time to look after themselves and each other and a range of practical support has been provided to those in need.

West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust

The changes made to the hospital means the trust is coping with its current capacity, and it is encouraging that figures for hospital admissions are flattening.

The trust has made great strides with its ability to test symptomatic staff and members of their households for COVID-19. The trust is now swabbing all patients who are admitted via the emergency department or maternity. The turnaround time for results has reduced to hours rather than days, thanks to work by the organisation's microbiology team.

Watford FC continues its tremendous support for the trust and is transforming an area into a clinic where expectant and post-natal mothers can attend appointments. The 'Lavender team' of specialist midwives will also be based there, providing maternity mental health and safeguarding support.

Faster turn-arounds for ambulances

Mobile cleaning of East of England Ambulance Service vehicles is now available at a number of acute trusts across the East of England region. The aim is to support crews with a quick turn-around, cleaning low level, non-Aerosol Gas Producing COVID contaminations where possible. The service does not replace the need for crews to complete their normal between-patient cleans.

District and borough council update

The main focus of district and borough communications has been raising awareness of the support available, both to residents – either through ‘HertsHelp’ or from councils directly – and to businesses. Watford and Welwyn Hatfield councils have been [highlighted by the Local Government Association](#) for their effective communications with residents, with examples including Facebook Q&A sessions in Watford and the use of video in Welwyn Hatfield.

Other campaign work continues to encourage the take-up of the grants available to small businesses and the retail and hospitality sector. A communications toolkit has been shared with council communication leads across the county, and the Local Enterprise Partnership is working with district and borough councils to coordinate other activity to engage with harder to reach businesses (including radio advertising and editorial).

Entering the second phase in the NHS response to COVID-19

Following the Prime Minister’s recent announcement that we are now entering the second phase in the NHS response to COVID-19, the NHS Chief Executive Sir Simon Stevens has provided some guidance about how health services could progress over the coming weeks.

The need for an emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic will continue for some time; we are still in what is called a ‘level 4 incident’ and the focus on managing that remains in place. At the same time, our NHS organisations also need to plan the ‘safe restart’ of some services, with infection prevention and patient safety continuing to be guiding principles. With our hospitals starting to see fewer patients with COVID-19, there will be opportunities to provide more urgent and time-critical surgery and also some routine planned care.

The past few weeks have seen a huge reliance on technology to provide services such as digital consultations and these ways of caring for patients while enabling social distancing will be retained. Ongoing use of technology-enabled care will reduce infection risk and support the reintroduction of services.

In the community, health services including general practice will support patients who need ongoing health care after recovering from COVID-19 as well as those patients with a range of other health needs. There will be actions for mental health providers too. There will be more to report on in coming weeks as we work through the process and practicalities of resuming services.

And finally....we need you

Any help and support you can give to re-iterate that NHS services are available and safe would be very much appreciated. Please look out for campaign information on social media over the coming weeks and share and repost this to your own communities whenever you can.

Thank you.