

Weekly digest

Monday 15 February 2021

Regular briefing for General Practices across NW London

The priority note for general practice in this week's digest is:

Covid-19 monitoring

Covid-19 continues to circulate at high levels in all boroughs in North West London, there are early signs that the national lockdown measures are having an impact however our hospitals remain very busy.

Our message to residents in NW London remains that your best protection is to stay at home and follow the national lockdown guidance; the single most important action we can all take now to protect the NHS and save lives.

National lockdown guidance is available here www.gov.uk/coronavirus

New strains

Many questions have been asked about if the vaccines work with the new strains. There is no evidence currently that the new strains will be resistant to the vaccines we have, so we are continuing to vaccinate people as normal.

Scientists are looking now in detail at the characteristics of the virus in relation to the vaccines. Viruses, such as the winter flu virus, often branch into different strains but these small variations rarely make vaccines ineffective.

Covid-19 vaccination

NW London meets first milestone vaccination target

We are extremely proud to announce that we have met the national vaccination target across NW London, vaccinating over 80% of all residents and providing protection for people in the top four priority groups; those aged 70 and over, care home residents and staff, the extremely clinically vulnerable and NHS staff.

The uptake in our boroughs has been fantastic with almost 400,000 residents being vaccinated; which means our most vulnerable residents now have a level of protection against this virus.

The next phase

From today over 65s and people in 'at risk' groups will begin to be invited for their vaccination either at a vaccination centre, local pharmacy or through their GP. People who receive a letter can book an appointment in a large scale vaccination centre or a pharmacy on the national booking system or by calling 119 free of charge, anytime between 7am and 11pm seven days a week.

GP led vaccination centres will initially focus on people in the clinically 'at risk' group such as those with long term conditions to support continuity of care.

It's not too late

However we are determined that nobody should be left behind.

So if you are aged 70 and over and haven't had your first dose yet, speak to your GP or visit the national booking system to book an appointment, link - www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination-or-by-calling-119.

For those who have received a vaccine you still need to follow all the guidance including social distancing, wearing face coverings and hand washing.

Vaccine safety & confidence

The Covid-19 vaccine is safe and saves lives.

- The development of the vaccine may have been fast but just like all other vaccines and medicines the Covid-19 vaccines have been extensively tested to ensure they are safe.
- To be approved to be used vaccines have to meet strict standards set out by an independent regulatory body called the 'Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The MHRA follows international standards of safety.
- So far, millions of people have been given a COVID-19 vaccine and reports of serious side effects, such as allergic reactions, have been very rare. No long-term complications have been reported.
- Other vaccines are being developed. They will only be available on the NHS once they have been thoroughly tested to make sure they are also safe and effective.
- Know the facts – use trusted sources of information, visit www.nwlondonccgs.nhs.uk/

Beware of Covid fraudsters

Joint advice from the NHS and law enforcement agencies on protecting yourself from COVID-19 cons.

Sadly we continue to hear reports of fraud and scammers relating to the vaccine roll out. In the UK, coronavirus vaccines will only be available via the National Health Service and is free of charge. You will be contacted by the NHS, your employer, a GP surgery or pharmacy local to you, to receive your vaccine. At no point will you be asked to pay.

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) is asking people to report suspect emails to its Suspicious Email Reporting Service simply by forwarding them to report@phishing.gov.uk. All emails forwarded to the service are analysed and if they are found to link to malicious content, it will be taken down or blocked, helping prevent future victims of crime.

- **If you receive a call you believe to be fraudulent, hang up. Suspicious text messages should be forwarded to the number 7726 which is free of charge and emails forwarded to report@phishing.gov.uk.**

The Suspicious Email Reporting Service is a world first which was launched last April by the NCSC in conjunction with the City of London Police. It has now received more than four million emails from the public, leading to the removal of over 26,000 scams and over 49,000 links to malicious content.

National social assets - <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/covid-19-vaccine/resources/additional-socialNHSVaccineInformation/>**

NWL vaccination information in full here -

<https://www.nwlondonccgs.nhs.uk/coronavirus/nhs-covid-19-vaccination-programme/large-vaccination-site-locations>

NW London FAQ - <https://www.nwlondonccgs.nhs.uk/coronavirus/nhs-covid-19-vaccination-programme>

Self-isolation

Symptoms of COVID-19 are most commonly any of the below. If you have any of these symptoms you **must** stay at home and [arrange to have a test](#):

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

Further information on testing below and here <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> .

Coronavirus: managing your symptoms

Many people will have mild coronavirus symptoms and will be able to treat their symptoms at home. You can find out more about managing your symptoms here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/how-to-treat-symptoms-at-home/>

When to seek help

If your symptoms worsen and you experience any of the following you should seek advice from NHS 111, online at 111.nhs.uk or by calling 111.

- Feeling breathless or difficulty breathing, especially when standing up or moving
- Severe muscle aches or tiredness
- Shakes or shivers
- If you use a pulse oximeter, your blood oxygen level is 94% or 93% or continues to be lower than your usual reading where your normal oxygen saturation is below 95% (re-take a reading within an hour first)
- Sense that something is wrong (general weakness, severe tiredness, loss of appetite, peeing much less than normal, unable to care for yourself – simple tasks like washing and dressing or making food).

Seek emergency help by calling 999 if –

- You are unable to complete short sentences when at rest due to breathlessness
- Your breathing gets worse suddenly.
- If you use a pulse oximeter and your blood oxygen levels are 92% or less (retake your reading immediately first)
- OR if you develop other worrying symptoms.

You can measure the oxygen levels in your blood at home with the help of a small device called a 'pulse oximeter'. Your GP will be able to advise if this is necessary and provide one if needed.

Testing

If you have symptoms, book a test. Home tests, drive through and walk in testing are all available. There are currently no known capacity issues at testing centres so appointments should be readily available.

Most people with coronavirus have at least one of these symptoms:

- **high temperature** - you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to take your temperature)
- **new, continuous cough** – coughing a lot for more than an hour or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- **loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – you can't smell or taste anything, or things smell and taste different to normal.

- **Book a test online** <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> or call 119.
- If you are isolating at home with symptoms or a positive test, there is [support available](#) on how to manage your symptoms.

If you are going into hospital for a planned procedure or you are taken into hospital in an emergency you will be tested.

Rapid Coronavirus testing for people without symptoms

Some people have Covid without knowing it, because they don't show or feel symptoms. All North West London Local Authorities are currently offering rapid testing using lateral flow tests, particularly for critical care workers unable to work at home.

If you receive a negative test result you must continue to follow national lockdown guidance to stop the spread.

Further information on how to get a rapid lateral flow test in a local test centre is available on your Local council website.

Apply for test and trace support payment

If you need to self-isolate because of coronavirus (COVID-19) and you cannot work from home, you may be eligible for financial support.

<https://www.gov.uk/test-and-trace-support-payment?priority-taxon=774cee22-d896-44c1-a611-e3109cce8eae>

Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19

If you are in this group, you will previously have received a letter from the NHS or from your GP telling you this. You may have been advised to shield in the past. New guidance is available here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Services

The NHS in North West London is reminding residents of the range of healthcare services available to help them. Here's a list of things you can do locally, online and over the phone that will help you stay well this winter.

- Visit www.nhs.uk for information
- Speak to a pharmacist
- Call your GP if you have an urgent health concern
- Access wellbeing and psychological support
- In an emergency call 999 or go to accident and emergency (A&E).
- Don't forget to get your flu jab

Accessing your GP

The NHS is very busy responding to the coronavirus pandemic and, at certain times, your GP practice may need to prioritise patients with the most urgent health needs.

If you have a health issue that isn't urgent, advice is available on the NHS website www.nhs.uk or NHS app or you can speak to your local pharmacist. You can also use e-consult which is available through your practice website. If you aren't sure what to do, please contact the practice who can advise you on how to get the help you need.

Please continue to attend tests, vaccinations and screening when invited.

www.111.nhs.uk is also available 24/7 for urgent health advice or by calling 111, and 999 is for emergencies.

Help Us Help You – access Mental Health services

We know mental health needs are increasing as a result of the pandemic, help is available from the NHS.

- The NHS is asking anyone facing feelings of anxiety and depression to come forward for care.
- Just talking can help – and NHS talking therapies are an effective way to address mental health issues.
- NHS Talking therapies can be delivered safely even during lockdown, with appointments available over the phone and online. Face to face appointments are also still available, and services have implemented new measures to limit infection risks.
- Download and circulate the [new resources](#) amongst your networks to reach as many people as possible.

Access services near you, you can refer yourself or speak to your GP or another healthcare professional for a referral. Visit www.westlondon.nhs.uk/service/iapt/ or www.talkingtherapies.cnl.nhs.uk/.

