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This is the second of a series of regular updates to community pharmacy regarding the emerging COVID-19 situation. An electronic copy of this letter and letters sent to the other primary care professions, and all other relevant guidance from NHS England and NHS Improvement, can be found here:

www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/

Dear colleagues

Thank you for your continued efforts for patients and the public at this time. We recognise that COVID-19 and managing concerns arising is taking up significant time for you all.

This letter will update you with the latest information.

Moving to the delay phase

The Prime Minister announced on Thursday 12 March 2020 that we have moved from the containment phase to the delay phase of managing COVID-19.

In particular, there is a case definition of continuous cough and/or high temperature and the Prime Minister confirmed that the advice to self-isolate will now extend to the whole household where one member has such symptoms. He also announced the introduction of new social distancing measures, including the identification of a cohort of our patients who are most at risk, the advice to whom will be to stay at home.

The new case definition has meant an update to all guidance which remains consolidated here: www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/

In summary:

- specific guidance on when to isolate for 7 days versus 14 days can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/news/new-guidance-for-households-with-possible-covid-19-infection
- travel history is now irrelevant
- anyone with these symptoms who is **WELL** can just stay at home and does not need to engage with 111 or be tested.
- anyone with these symptoms who is **UNWELL** should go to 111 online first for advice, rather than approaching their GP practice or pharmacy
- this applies to staff as well as patients
- information on a new testing policy will be published soon.



We understand there is an increased demand for delivery of medicines currently and that this advice may well further increase demand. We are discussing with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) and others how we best ensure medicines are delivered to those who need them and have announced that, if required, there will be additional funding for a medicines delivery service to support those self-isolating at home.

Community pharmacy standard operating procedure

This is being reviewed in line with the latest guidance and will be updated as soon as possible.

Community pharmacies may wish to consider how to offer services remotely where possible and appropriate for their patients.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Packs of PPE have been delivered to community pharmacies by DPD. This began on 13 March 2020; and deliveries should have been completed by 18.00 on 17 March. These are only for use by the pharmacy staff and patients isolated in the pharmacy and only in line with the standard operating procedure. They must not be sold to the public.

The packs will contain:

- 1 box of fluid repellent face masks (50 pack)
- 1 roll of aprons (200)
- 1 box of gloves (100 pairs).

If pharmacies have not received their PPE packs by Wednesday 18 March, or if the pack delivered is incomplete, please contact the National Supply Disruption Service. Contact details are: 0800 915 9964 or email supplydisruptionservice@nhsbsa.nhs.uk. Opening hours: Monday to Friday 08:00-18:00.

Further arrangements on how to reorder stock that has been used in line with the SOP are being put into place and will be communicated to you shortly.

Reviewing current primary care services in preparation for any need to release capacity

We are taking steps to review the broad spectrum of current services across the primary care professions to assess how additional capacity might be released if required. The first of these for pharmacy are outlined below.

We have already waived the requirement for contractors to complete the National Antimicrobial Stewardship Clinical Audit for 2019/20.

The following additional measures have been agreed with PSNC.

Hepatitis C antibody testing advanced service

We will delay the introduction of the Hepatitis C antibody testing advanced service from April 2020 for at least three months.

Pharmacy Quality Scheme

The Pharmacy Quality Scheme (PQS) for 2020/21 will also be postponed for at least three months. This decision will be kept under review. The released £18.75 million will be delivered to contractors for activity associated with the COVID-19 response. The detail of this is currently being discussed with PSNC.

In the meantime, please be assured that payments for the declarations made for the 2019/20 scheme are progressing and will be reconciled with any earlier aspiration payment on 1 April as outlined in the Drug Tariff.

Pharmacy Integration Fund pilots

The three Pharmacy Integration Programme pilot/proof of concept projects announced in the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) letter of 23 February 2020: www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-pharmacy-contractual-framework-2019-to-2024/year-2-detail have been postponed.

These pilot/proof of concept projects, which were due to begin in April 2020, are:

- piloting blood pressure testing in community pharmacy
- piloting stop smoking support in community pharmacy for patients discharged from hospital
- proof of concept testing an antimicrobial stewardship programme for community pharmacy (referred to as “point of care testing for Streptococcus A in community pharmacy as a proof of concept to support improved safeguards around antibiotic prescribing” in the open letter).

General Practice Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (GP CPCS)

The existing GP CPCS pilots will continue to operate but we will not be extending the GP CPCS pilot any further at this time.

Other contractual requirements

We understand that coming up to the end of the financial year contractors may be busy completing contractual requirements. We will not take contractual action against contractors who have not, by 31 March 2020, yet completed requirements associated with their community pharmacy patient questionnaire, updating their practice leaflet, completing their pharmacy clinical audit or competing the Data

Security and Protection Toolkit self-assessment (information governance requirements still apply). The following from NHS Digital is helpful:

www.dsptoolkit.nhs.uk/News

Any health campaign activity should now be focused entirely on providing official messaging to the public regarding COVID-19. We will not require data returns at the current time, eg regarding NMS and MURs or complaints, and will delay, where possible, provider assurance activity and routine contract monitoring visits.

Our regional teams will be asked to review the current need for Local Enhanced Services that are not considered to support the national COVID-19 response, local audit and local assurance activities and local data collections.

These decisions will be kept under review. Other areas are also being considered and we will include updates in future letters.

NHS Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS)

The NHS 111 phone service is continuing for people who are asymptomatic, and we are seeing increased referral numbers. Thank you for continuing to provide great care to patients who are being referred.

So that we can ensure the ongoing advice is appropriate in respect of coronavirus, the questions in the NHS Pathways system (used by NHS 111 to triage the patient) are under regular review. An update is being introduced to improve the identification of patients with COVID-19 concerns or who are presenting with symptoms of cough and/or fever. Only once a patient has passed these questions will they be assessed as suitable for other services such as NHS CPCS. Additional instructions have also been put in place specifically related to NHS CPCS to ensure call advisors are reminded to not send patients with any symptoms related to COVID-19 or members of the same household.

Please now consider contacting the patient by telephone once you receive an NHS CPCS referral. Through your conversation with the patient it may be appropriate to advise the patient not to come into the pharmacy, and to complete the NHS CPCS referral via telephone. Some patients may need access to over-the-counter medicines to support self-care for minor illness or to pick up an urgent supply of medicines and so it might be appropriate to discuss how they are delivered or if a friend, relative, carer or community volunteer is able to collect.

The NHS 111 online service for urgent medicines supply, which is only available in some regions, is also continuing.

Supply chain

There are currently no medicine shortages as a result of COVID-19. The country is well prepared to deal with any impacts of the coronavirus and the Government has been working with manufacturers and suppliers to ensure people can continue to access the medicines they need.

To relieve potential pressures on global supply chains, UK medicines suppliers have been asked by DHSC to carry out a risk assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on their business for all medicines – Prescription Only Medicines (POMs), Pharmacy only (P) meds and General Sales List (GSL), irrespective of where the medicine originates from.

The DHSC is working closely with industry, the NHS and others in the supply chain to ensure patients can access the medicines they need, and precautions are in place to reduce the likelihood of future shortages.

It is essential that GPs do not issue prescriptions for a longer duration, pharmacies do not order larger quantities, and patients and the public do not seek to stockpile medicines as this behaviour could put the supply chain at risk.

DHSC is monitoring the impact of coronavirus on UK medicines supply. Information on this activity can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-monitor-impact-of-coronavirus-on-uk-medicine-supply

Hand sanitisers, soaps and over the counter medicines

It is clearly very important that people are able to easily access soap to wash their hands in line with PHE guidance. Therefore, can I ask that pharmacies restrict quantities issued so that there is enough for everyone, for example one soap product per customer. We all know that stockpiling simply causes problems with the supply chain and can lead to unnecessary shortages. Pharmacies should put in place mechanisms to ensure they can supply a sensible quantity of all of these products to as many of their customers as possible.

Electronic repeat dispensing

General practices have been asked to consider putting all suitable patients on electronic repeat dispensing as their next repeat prescriptions are issued. More information on electronic repeat dispensing can be found here: <https://digital.nhs.uk/services/electronic-prescription-service/electronic-repeat-dispensing-for-prescribers>

Longer duration prescriptions should not be issued by GPs at this time to protect the supply chain.

Pharmacy and practice closures

If a local pharmacy or practice needs to close, they must contact their commissioner – our Regional Team for pharmacy. The team will provide advice to the pharmacy and support maintaining access to pharmaceutical services. Guidance is being developed for these situations, taking learning from situations where this has already occurred. We are aware of the financial impact of this on pharmacies and are considering options that may be available to support contactors. We are also aware of staffing issues.

If these impact on your ability to provide pharmaceutical services, please contact your Regional Team. Please be assured we are discussing these issues further with PSNC currently; the NHS has committed to make payments where required to contractors who are required to close due to COVID-19. We will also put in place a remunerated NHS Urgent Medicines Supply Service for patients whose general practice has closed.

NSAIDS

New interim guidance on the use of NSAIDs to relieve COVID-19 symptoms is now available and a CAS alert was issued on 17 March:

www.cas.mhra.gov.uk/ViewandAcknowledgment/ViewAlert.aspx?AlertID=103001

Paracetamol is the preferred treatment pending a rapid review of the evidence. Those patients prescribed NSAIDs for other conditions should continue as normal unless advised otherwise by their doctor.

Additional sources of information

All our guidance for healthcare professionals can be found on our website:

www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) has issued new guidance to help people keep safe when getting medicines or treatments online:

<https://pharmacyregulation.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=2a9eeb21f465e0931a30e5d65&id=3763cb612e&e=34d98fa0d3>

We will use a variety of additional methods to keep you informed of the emerging situation, alongside regulators and professional bodies, and through formal and informal networks including social and wider media. You can follow these Twitter accounts to keep up to date:

- NHS England and NHS Improvement @NHSEngland
- Department of Health and Social Care @DHSCgovuk
- Public Health England @PHE_uk

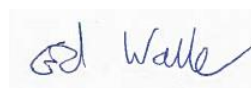
We do understand that at this time pharmacy staff may need to make difficult decisions to do their best for patients and the public. We would like to reassure you that these circumstances will be fully taken into account by NHS England and NHS Improvement in exercising our responsibilities as the commissioner of pharmaceutical services. Thank you for your understanding and continuing support, it is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely



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