



News Alert

Wednesday 4th March 2020

COVID-19: An update for community pharmacy

The Government has published an action plan detailing how it will handle the potential spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus in the UK.

The plan, developed in response to increasing numbers of cases across the world, builds on observations about the behaviour of similar viruses (e.g. seasonal influenza) and contingency planning from previous outbreaks (e.g. swine flu). Government strategy has been broken down into stages – containment (the current stage), delay, research and mitigation – which will be enacted if and when ministers decide a higher level of response is needed.

Whilst the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is clear that the UK is currently focusing on stage 1 (containing the spread), this action plan provides the public and business owners with further details of what may happen should COVID-19 become more widespread.

Coronavirus action plan

The plan is a high-level document which will be supported by further guidance to the NHS, including community pharmacies, in due course. Initial guidance for pharmacies was published last week by NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) but further work will now need to take place to work through how the sector will contribute to some of the many challenges that could arise in an epidemic situation.

PSNC has commenced discussions with HM Government on matters such as the provision of protective equipment for pharmacies; contingency funding for any pharmacies who need it; protection for pharmacies against sudden medicines price rises; and ensuring ongoing provision of pharmaceutical services in the case of significant volumes of staff absences. Much of this builds on discussions we have had with the NHS previously about pandemic planning.

Simon Dukes, PSNC Chief Executive, said:

"The evolving COVID-19 situation is worrying for many people in the UK but particularly so for the health professionals on the front line. Community pharmacy teams are already putting themselves at risk dealing with this illness, and that will continue to be the case as this situation worsens. Pharmacies must be treated as a core part of the NHS in all epidemic planning, and PSNC will ensure that HM Government is aware of the critical part they have to play and the support – including financial – they will need through any epidemic.

HM Government is in the early stages of planning the response to COVID-19, building on the considerable pandemic planning work of the past. There are many details still to be worked out and PSNC will be a part of those discussions, looking at how we can best protect the network of community pharmacies and allow them to continue their crucial work through this crisis. We will continue to update contractors as often as we can."

What contractors and pharmacy teams can do now

Contractors and pharmacy teams can take the following actions to ensure they are well prepared:

1. Read the NHSE&I guidance and implement its recommended actions regarding preparing for COVID-19;
2. Clearly display the COVID-19 posters at points of entry to your pharmacy and near the medicines counter;
3. Read your business continuity plan and consider whether it needs to be updated to reflect the current and emerging situation;
4. Keep up to date with developments by regularly checking the information on [COVID-19 on GOV.UK](#) and checking your NHSmail shared mailbox on a regular basis for updates from NHSE&I.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – the NHSE&I guidance recommends that pharmacies have disposable fluid-resistant face masks (“surgical face masks”), disposable gloves and aprons for use in the event that an emergency means that pharmacy staff have to enter a designated isolation space where a person with suspected coronavirus infection is present. The PPE would also be used when decontaminating a designated isolation space, after a person with suspected coronavirus infection has left the premises. Based on the current expert advice, the NHSE&I guidance does not recommend that PPE needs to be used in other circumstances, e.g. when serving patients on the medicines counter.

Pharmacy contractors have reported that PPE, particularly face masks, are currently difficult to source. HM Government is aware of this and they are taking steps to ensure that face masks will be available to order from pharmacy wholesalers, so contractors can obtain supplies for use by staff in the above circumstances.

Keep up-to-date with our hub page: psnc.org.uk/coronavirus

Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee



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