



# COVID-19 Update

Wednesday 1st April 2020

This new, daily update contains important information for community pharmacy teams about the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## In today's update: Easter opening, NHSE&I letter, delivery service, PPE, prescription charges

### Easter opening hours

PSNC is keen, like all parts of the NHS, to ensure that patients have access to any pharmaceutical services that they need over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend.

Traditionally the weeks before Easter are busy for community pharmacies, but we expect that the increase in prescription volumes seen over the past few weeks as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic may mean that the seasonal demand has been largely met already.

We are in **urgent** discussions with NHSE&I about what might be an appropriate level of service cover over the Easter Bank Holidays. We are keen to ensure that neither too few nor too many pharmacies are open, and we are seeking agreement from NHSE&I that the existing arrangements will be sufficient. Normally about a quarter to a third of the network is open on Good Friday and Bank Holiday Monday.

However, GP practices have been asked to open on Good Friday and Bank Holiday Monday and NHSE&I, with the agreement of the Secretary of State, has the option of using new NHS regulations introduced at the end of last week, to ask (require) community pharmacies to open on Good Friday and Bank Holiday Monday, for a set number of hours, if it considers this to be appropriate.

We will update contractors on the outcome of our discussions as soon as we can.

### NHSE&I letter: Protection of staff and managing supply

The latest [COVID-19 preparedness letter for community pharmacy](#) from NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) provides further guidance and information on support for pharmacy teams.

Key points include:

#### Protection of staff

Social distancing alongside installation of bollards, physical barriers or screens is considered to be the most effective way of protecting staff. To support the installation of such barriers, **NHSE&I will make a £300 payment** to all pharmacies, except distance-selling pharmacies.

PSNC had been pressing NHSE&I to recognise the costs of installing protective barriers for pharmacy staff. Some contractors are reporting high prices for protective screens but many have been able to source these at reasonable prices and sometimes on a cost-only basis from suppliers looking to support the NHS through the pandemic.

### **Capacity changes**

NHSE&I will be using the Directory of Services (DoS) to monitor capacity changes within primary care. Contractors are therefore requested to continue to update their capacity status on their DoS profile. Please also remember to inform your local NHSE&I team of unavoidable closures and update the NHS website for patients and the public.

[Read a longer summary of the letter here](#)

## **Pandemic Delivery Service**

A medicines delivery service for very vulnerable 'shielded' patients, who have been asked to stay at home for a period of 12 weeks to try to avoid contracting coronavirus, was announced by HM Government in late March. The announcement was made at an early stage of our negotiations on such a service with NHSE&I and DHSC.

Discussions on such a service are complex, and ongoing. The Government's desire to involve the national volunteer network (NHS Volunteer Responders), and the need therefore to involve other partners in the discussions, is one factor increasing the time needing to be spent on these discussions.

PSNC is concerned that patient and medicines safety are protected, and that undue workload or liabilities do not fall to contractors.

We will give a further update as soon as we have news, but in the meantime **contractors are reminded that as things currently stand there is no NHS-funded medicines delivery service** (for any group of patients, other than for specified appliances) and so contractors offering deliveries at the moment are doing so at their own expense and risk.

## **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Recognising that community pharmacy teams are working on the frontline of the health service, PSNC wants them to have access to whatever PPE they believe they need.

As well as helping to protect customers and patients, PPE use could help pharmacy teams to work more safely together in dispensaries that are not large enough to allow staff to stay 2m apart from one another.

PSNC is still pressing NHSE&I to ensure that pharmacy teams have access to whatever PPE they need. We note that Public Health England are currently reviewing their guidance on the use of PPE and we hope this will take a sensible approach, recognising the daily risks that many pharmacy teams are taking.

## **NHS prescription charge**

Today (1st April) the NHS prescription charge increases to £9.15 per prescription item.

PSNC raised the collection of prescription charges during the COVID-19 pandemic as an unnecessary administrative burden and potential infection risk (through the handling of money) in discussions with HM Government several weeks ago.

We believe the charge should be suspended and as such we support the work that the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) and others are also doing to press for this.

We will continue to press the Department of Health Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) for the urgent resolution of this matter and will update community pharmacy teams as soon as possible.

In the meantime, you can [download PSNC's new Prescription Charge Card](#).

**Keep up-to-date with our hub page: [psnc.org.uk/coronavirus](https://psnc.org.uk/coronavirus)**

*Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee*



14 Hosier Lane, London, EC1A 9LQ  
Tel: 0203 1220 810 | Email: [info@psnc.org.uk](mailto:info@psnc.org.uk)