



COVID-19 Update

Saturday 4th 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 hours; Letter from the Minister; EPS nominations via NHS App

COVID-19 Easter Opening Hours for Pharmacies

NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) has announced that it will require all community pharmacies in England to open **from 2pm to 5pm on 10 April 2020 (Good Friday) and 13 April 2020 (Easter Monday)**.

The requirement is being made under the [National Health Service \(Amendments Relating to the Provision of Primary Care Services During a Pandemic etc.\) Regulations 2020](#) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In its COVID-19 Primary Care Bulletin email last night, NHSE&I said that:

- Any pharmacies already planning to open for longer hours should do so;
- If a pharmacy is unable to open for reasons beyond the control of the contractor they should notify their NHSE&I regional office in the usual way and update the NHS 111 DoS;
- Community pharmacies in areas where there is minimal demand due to the Government's social distancing policy (eg in large shopping centres) should seek exemption from their NHSE&I regional team; and
- Pharmacies should make sure NHS website profiles include correct opening hours to support patient access.

Contractors will be able to claim a payment for these opening hours. Monies will come from over and above the global sum, but NHSE&I has said funding will not reflect bank or public holiday premiums – PSNC is arguing that it must do so.

The decision to require all pharmacies to open has been made unilaterally by NHSE&I who say that access to pharmaceutical services will be needed on these day to support GPs who will open for business as usual on Good Friday and Easter Monday as part of the overall NHS response to the pandemic.

PSNC argued against this requirement for all pharmacies to open on the grounds that there will already be sufficient numbers of pharmacies open under usual Bank Holiday arrangements. Our understanding is that between a third and a quarter of the network is open on those two days already and some local NHSE&I teams have already made additional provision for local needs.

NHSE&I regional teams have been given power to stand down pharmacies in local areas *where there is minimal demand due to the Government's social distancing policy (e.g. large shopping malls)* so contractors and LPCs are encouraged to discuss with local regional teams exactly how this will be interpreted.

PSNC, along with the CCA, NPA and AIM, had also asked NHSE&I to ensure that any decision on this was based on real evidence of the additional need – we have not seen any such evidence.

PSNC Chief Executive Simon Dukes said:

“This decision by NHSE&I does not represent a negotiated position – PSNC’s view is that the planned openings over the Bank Holidays would have been sufficient to meet patients’ needs and we have seen no evidence to the contrary. However, NHSE&I now have the power to demand that pharmacies open at any time and they are choosing to exercise that power.

Community pharmacies will always step up to help primary care colleagues, but while many GPs are now operating on a permanently closed-door basis, that is not an option for pharmacy. Our teams have been flat out over the past three weeks dealing with unprecedented demand – they desperately needed this break.

Over this weekend we will be putting a case to NHSE&I for fair funding to cover contractors’ costs for these opening hours. Any decision to treat the Bank Holidays as normal days fails to recognise the legal responsibilities that employers have to pay enhanced rates for work on these days, and we are trying to change their minds on this.

We have made clear to NHSE&I just how disruptive making a decision like this on less than a week’s notice is for businesses, pharmacy teams, and their own families who also rely on them. Pharmacy teams had been holding on for this break and we are concerned that there may be an increase in temporary closures now that contractors have to manage workload pressures and staff exhaustion without the Easter break.”

Read this story at: <https://psnc.org.uk/our-news/covid-19-easter-opening-hours-for-pharmacies/>

Minister writes open letter to pharmacy

Jo Churchill MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for community pharmacy, has written an open letter thanking pharmacists and pharmacy teams for their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said that Government recognised that pharmacy teams were on the front line and thanked them for the outstanding response they were giving patients.

The Minister said she had heard directly from pharmacists about how challenging the situation was and that she was committed to getting them what they need to do the best for the people they serve.

Referencing recent discussions with PSNC and the RPS, the letter said: “There are ongoing discussions about what more can be done to support you including making funding available to help you with COVID pressures and the new services we are asking of community pharmacy during this time. I have also been listening to your concerns about capacity in community pharmacy.”

Read the letter from Jo Churchill at: <https://psnc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/PSP-Open-Letter-to-Pharmacy-DHSC-template.pdf>

EPS pharmacy nominations via NHS App

The NHS App now has a new feature that allows patients to view and change their EPS pharmacy nomination. Being able to update nominations in the NHS App means patients can more easily choose the pharmacy that is right for them during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The NHS App team at NHS Digital have been working on this development for some time, but its release has been prioritised to help patients and primary care teams better cope with ordering and obtaining prescriptions during the pandemic.

Having a pharmacy nomination in EPS removes the need for patients to collect FP10s from GP practices and drop them off at a pharmacy, supporting the public to observe social distancing. It is also intended to help reduce the nomination-setting burden on pharmacy teams and GP practices during this busy time. To nominate a distance selling pharmacy (DSPs), patients must register with the pharmacy through their website or contact them directly; this is because DSPs normally need to collect additional information on patients that are nominating their pharmacy beyond simple demographic data, so they are able to provide an appropriate service when the first nominated script arrives for the patient.

[Learn more about the nominated pharmacy feature](#)

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