

Media Release

27 August 2020

Doctors in Devon issue urgent reminders: face-to-face GP appointments still available, only come to A&E in an emergency

People in Devon are being reassured they will still get a face-to-face appointment at their local practice if their GP thinks they need one, and that they should only go to hospital A&E departments in an emergency.

With the danger of COVID-19 still very much present in Devon, GP practices have measures in place to protect patients and staff by reducing unnecessary contact and travel. They are reminding local people to follow these simple **six steps** when contacting their surgery:

1. If you need to seek advice from your GP practice, contact them online via their website, or by phone
2. To protect you and your practice's staff, you are likely to be offered a telephone, online or video consultation in the first instance
3. Your GP **will** give you a face-to-face appointment at the practice if they identify that you need one
4. If you do need to visit for an appointment, your practice will tell you everything you need to know when you come and what measures are in place to keep you safe
5. If your GP thinks you need to be referred to hospital for review or treatment, they will arrange this
6. If you are given an appointment at the practice or the hospital, it's really important to attend

Dr Simon Kerr, a GP at Coleridge Medical Centre, Ottery St Mary, and a member of Devon Clinical Commissioning Group's Governing Body, said: "In most cases when a patient contacts their local practice, doctors will talk to them by phone, video or online in the first instance.

"This may be different from what people are used to, but often enables a faster response and is vitally important as a measure to help keep patients and practice staff safe.

"If your doctor needs to see you in person, they will do – face-to-face appointments are still happening across Devon where they are needed.



“Many of our patients have really appreciated phone and online consultations, praising them for being more convenient and reducing the need to travel.”

Meanwhile, consultants in Devon’s hospitals say waiting times at Accident and Emergency departments are on the up and are reminding people only to go to A&E if they have been referred there by another part of the NHS or have a genuine emergency.

Measures such as social distancing, designated areas for people with and without COVID-19 and more cleaning are in place at local hospitals to keep patients and staff safe, but in many cases they mean fewer people can be seen, adding to the pressure on local services.

Dr Rob Dyer, Consultant at Torbay Hospital and lead Medical Director for Devon, said: “We need people to choose the right service for their needs.

“People should continue to call 999 and attend the A&E Departments if they believe they have a serious illness, for example if they or a loved one see the signs of stroke, severe chest pain or worsening asthma. And if you have been invited to the hospital for an appointment, it’s important that you go.

“We’re seeing waiting times increase at A&E departments and many people who are attending could get the help they need from other local services.”

The NHS in Devon is reminding local people and visitors how to access local services:

- **Self-care** is the best choice to treat minor illnesses and injuries like a coughs, colds, grazes, small cuts or a sore throat. They can be treated at home or in holiday accommodation with over-the-counter medicines and plenty of rest.
- **Pharmacists** advise and treat illnesses like hay fever, diarrhoea, earache, painful cough, sticky eye, teething and rashes – and by visiting your pharmacy you can avoid an unnecessary trip to your GP or A&E and save time. Find your nearest pharmacy here: www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-pharmacy/
- **Minor Injury Services** – always check local arrangements.
- **NHS website** – www.nhs.uk – always available for advice and guidance.
- **NHS 111** click on 111.nhs.uk (for people aged over five only) or call **111** if you’re feeling unwell, unsure or if you need health advice and guidance in non-life-threatening emergencies - available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- **Urgent Mental Health Support** – If you are an adult and need urgent mental health support, call: **Devon and Torbay** 0300 555 5000; **Plymouth** 01752 434922 (24 hours), Children and young people under 18, parents and carers in **Plymouth** can call 01752 435122
- **A&E/999** are best used in an emergency for serious or life-threatening conditions like severe bleeding, breathing difficulties, severe chest pain and loss of consciousness. A&E departments are not an alternative to a GP appointment.

ENDS



Notes to editors

For more information, call 01392 674801 or email D-CCG.Communications@nhs.net

Devon CCG, acts as the headquarters for the NHS in the county and has a budget of more than £1.9 billion.

It brings together experienced healthcare professionals to decide what services are needed in the local area and ensure that they are provided to the 1.2 million patients across the county. The process of planning, buying and monitoring healthcare is known as commissioning.

Devon CCG commissions other organisations – including NHS trusts, NHS foundation trusts, independent organisations, social enterprises and charities – to provide services such as:

- Urgent and emergency care, such as NHS 111, A&E and ambulance services
- Planned (elective) hospital care, such as operations and treatments
- Mental health services
- Community health services, including community nursing and physiotherapy
- Rehabilitation for people recovering from operations and certain conditions
- Maternity and new-born services (excluding neonatal intensive care)
- Health services for children and young people
- Infertility services
- Continuing health care for people with on-going health needs

Devon CCG was formed on 1 April 2019 from the merger of South Devon and Torbay CCG and Northern, Eastern and Western Devon CCG. From 1 April 2019, Devon CCG took on responsibility for commissioning primary care (mainly GP) services in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, a role which formerly belonged to NHS England.

For further information on NHS Devon CCG, visit www.DevonCCG.nhs.uk

