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This is the first of a series of regular updates to community pharmacy regarding the emerging COVID-19 situation.

Dear colleagues

I recognise that COVID-19 is placing a new and increasing challenge on already busy pharmacies, and that this will be an area of concern for you, your teams and your patients.

I would like to reassure you that we are continually refining our plans for this outbreak, working with our key partners, and drawing on lessons learned from previous incidents and listening to feedback received on emerging COVID-19 issues.

In this letter, I would like to update you on **what is happening, how we plan to communicate with you** and share some **key resources**.

As part of our preparedness plans, we will have advice and plans in place to **prioritise work to help manage an increased pressure** on the workforce, models to care for vulnerable and self-isolating members of the public and staff, and approaches to temporarily increase workforce capacity. Further details of these arrangements will be announced as required.

What is happening?

It is important that you are kept safe and informed during this period. You can find the latest **guidance for keeping yourself safe and well** here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/wuhan-novel-coronavirus>

We have recently published **standard operating procedures** for primary care www.england.nhs.uk/publication/coronavirus-standard-operating-procedures-for-primary-care-settings/ Please can you read through these and take the actions requested within. **Public Health England has also issued interim advice for primary care which you can also find on our website:**

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

As outlined in the standard operating procedure pharmacies will have limited need for personal protective equipment. Gloves, aprons and fluid repellent face masks should currently be ordered via normal wholesalers in small quantities. These should be only for use by the pharmacy staff and isolated patients in line with the standard operating procedure and **must not** be sold to the public. Superintendent pharmacists and responsible pharmacists should ensure this is the case.



PHE will be working with wholesalers to ensure their stocks are replenished. A pack containing gloves, aprons and fluid repellent face masks will be delivered to general practices early this week and we are making arrangements for a similar pack to be delivered to pharmacies later in this week and early next week. Strictly enforced arrangements for further replenishment will be in place and will be communicated to you shortly.

The professional regulators have issued guidance to support health professionals in these challenging circumstances, encouraging partnership working, flexibility and operating in line with the best available guidance. You can read the statement here www.pharmacyregulation.org/news/how-we-will-continue-regulate-light-novel-coronavirus-covid-19. The CQC is also working closely with NHS England and NHS Improvement and wrote to providers on 4 March outlining their plans.

Business continuity: We would like to encourage all pharmacies to **check their business continuity plans** (BCPs) and identify specific roles and actions which could support managing local demand – ensuring you work in collaboration with neighbouring pharmacies, local practices and the wider local multidisciplinary team. We will provide further advice on managing closures as it becomes necessary.

Changes to online booking: Pharmacies may need to consider online booking systems they have in place and how potentially infected patients will understand through the online booking system that they should not attend the pharmacy when they are patients who should be receiving advice to self-isolate and go through testing. More information can be found at www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/.

Prescriptions: Pharmacies should not support patients trying to stockpile: these actions may put a strain on the supply chain and exacerbate any potential shortages. General practices have been asked to consider putting all suitable patients on electronic repeat dispensing as their next repeat prescriptions are issued. The whole repeatable prescription can be valid for a year, but each repeat should be for no longer than the patient has now. For example, if the patient has prescriptions for a month's supply now, then the repeat dispensing should be set up as 13 x 28 days supply.

In general, excess purchasing or stockpiling of medicines can impact adversely on the supply chain and can result in shortages. It remains important therefore for pharmacies not to do this

National Clinical Audit: Following discussions with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, NHS England and NHS Improvement have taken the decision to waive the requirement to complete the National Antimicrobial Stewardship Clinical Audit for 2019/2020.

Useful resources

You can download the latest materials to display to the public here

www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/ This will soon include posters for pharmacies that need to close for cleaning. There is also new wording for pharmacy websites and other communications channels.

Our current standard patient guidance is as follows:

The latest information on symptoms of coronavirus infection and areas where recent travel may have resulted in a high risk of exposure can be found on

nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

NHS 111 has an [online coronavirus service](#) that can tell you if you need medical help and advise you what to do.

Use this service if:

- you think you might have coronavirus
- in the last 14 days you've been to a country or area with a high risk of coronavirus
- you've been in close contact with someone with coronavirus.

Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital. Call 111 if you need to speak to someone.

Everyone is being reminded to follow the public health advice on the [NHS website](#) to avoid catching or spreading coronavirus.

Please **bookmark the dedicated NHS England and NHS Improvement COVID-19 web page** <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/epr/coronavirus/> that includes important updates for the NHS including primary care providers (inclusive of general practice, community pharmacy, dental and optical providers).

If you need any **COVID-19 specific public health advice** which is not already covered in published guidance, please contact your Local Health Protection Unit or your local commissioner.

How we plan to communicate with you

1. At urgent times of need: Central Alerting System:

- For urgent patient safety communications, we will contact you through the **Central Alerting System (CAS)**.

2. At less urgent times: Commissioner's cascade:

- For less urgent COVID-19 communications we will email you through our regional teams to your premises specific NHS mail account.

Pharmacy action: please ensure that your premises specific NHS Mail account is checked regularly for updated information.

3. Supportive additional information

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

Thank you for your understanding and continuing support, it is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Keith

Dr Keith Ridge CBE

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