

Patient Update

Newsletter for Patient Participation Groups

December 2020



Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

From Berkshire West CCG



Hello,

Well, it's been a very bumpy ride this year so I'm hoping everyone is able to enjoy some much needed rest and relaxation over the festive period and is able to catch up with family and friends one way or another.

I know from talking to some of our PPGs that it's been a challenge keeping your groups and meetings going during the pandemic. Access to Practices has been very limited and that vital face-to-face contact hasn't been available for many of you. In a way, this is when the role of the PPGs becomes even more important as people need to know what's going on and what changes are happening at their local surgeries. They must also be involved in these changes and kept up to speed about the 'when', 'why' and 'what does it mean for me' elements.

We do as much as we can to let you know what is happening and when changes are coming on stream. And as the eyes and ears of your Practices, you are often in the best position to cascade this information within your communities. Please let me know if your group is struggling and needs some extra support. And, if you haven't already considered it, why not look at hosting virtual PPG meetings – many of our Berkshire West groups are doing this and are pleased with the way it's working. Again, please shout if you'd like to set up virtual sessions.

As we come to the end of 2020 I'm sure many of you would just like to draw a veil over this very miserable year, but I think it's important we remember some positives. Our health and care teams have surpassed themselves, providing first class care during some extremely difficult situations, and often whilst they're carrying concerns about their own health and that of their loved ones. Communities have pulled together to achieve some amazing things, and I know many of you will have been part of these efforts to offer vital support to vulnerable people within your neighbourhoods. So a huge, heartfelt thank you to everyone. I really do feel, now the vaccination programme is being rolled out, that we can start to look forward to 2021 with some hope in our hearts.

With warm wishes
Wendy



Wendy Bower, Patient & Public Engagement Lay Member, Berkshire West CCG

Covid vaccination update

GPs in Berkshire West begin offering COVID-19 vaccine as part of the biggest NHS immunisation programme – 15 December

Patients are now starting to receive Covid-19 vaccinations at two Berkshire West GP surgeries, Wargrave and Tilehurst, in the latest stage of the roll out of the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history.

Over the next couple of weeks other GP practices will be joining forces and contacting patients to offer them the vaccination, initially to patients over 80 years old and frontline health and care workers.

Today's milestone marks significant work from practice teams across Berkshire West to work rapidly over the last weeks to plan for the vaccination programme, redesign their sites and put in place safe processes to meet the tough logistical challenges of offering the vaccination.



People are asked not to contact their GP surgery so that their practice team can focus on arranging the vaccinations and provide day to day for all of their registered patients. You will be contacted when it is your turn to receive the vaccine.

Dr Abid Irfan, Chair of Berkshire West CCG said:

“Today marks a significant day in Berkshire West as we go live with our first GP led services in the greatest vaccination programme ever undertaken by the NHS.

“It has been incredible to see the efforts of GP practices and teams across Berkshire West coming together to work collectively to prepare for today and I am proud of everyone who is involved.

“Whilst the vaccine offers our best defence against the virus, it's important to remember that it doesn't mean we can start to relax our attention to the hands, face, space regulations. I'd urge everyone to continue doing everything they can to comply with the Government's rules and play their part in helping to keep themselves and their families safe,” added Dr Irfan.

Key message for the public

The public have an important part to play to help them do this:

- please don't contact the NHS to seek a vaccine, we will contact you;
- when we do contact you, please attend your booked appointments; and
- please continue to follow all the guidance to control the virus and save lives.

Oxford Imam Covid vaccine video

A study from the Royal Society for Public Health found 57% of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people said they would take the Covid vaccine, compared with 79% of white people who said they would take the vaccine.

These figures came on the day Imam Monawar Hussain, the Muslim Chaplain at Oxford University Hospital, was filmed receiving his COVID-19 vaccine. [The video is on YouTube.](#)

Pregnant women encouraged to get their flu jab

Following the recent announcement about the arrival of the covid vaccine and that it will not be given to pregnant women – Berkshire West health officials are keen to highlight, that the flu vaccine remains safe and highly recommended.

Pregnancy naturally weakens the body's immune system and as a result, flu can cause serious complications. So it's recommended that all pregnant women have their flu vaccine as soon as possible to protect themselves and their babies this winter.

Health officials have highlighted concerns that the covid vaccine messaging may lead to confusion and deter pregnant women from having their flu jab.

Debbie Simmons, Director of Nursing at Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) said: “Pregnant women remain a priority group for a free flu vaccination and making sure you’re protected is more important than ever this year – it’s safe and the best protection for you and your unborn baby. Talk to your GP, midwife or pharmacist about getting it as soon as possible. Lots of measures are in place to make sure the vaccine is given in a safe environment.”

Pregnant women will not however be given the covid vaccine due to a lack of data on its safety, this is also the case for women who are breastfeeding or hoping to become pregnant within three months of getting the vaccination. Pregnant women and those breastfeeding or looking to conceive will receive the covid vaccine after they have given birth and finished breastfeeding.

Royal Visit

Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited the Royal Berkshire Hospital this month on the final lap of a three-day train tour around the UK to thank front line staff who ‘kept Britain moving’ during the pandemic.

Sixteen front line nurses and midwives from the RBH spoke to the Royal couple about the challenges they faced dealing with Covid, and how the health teams all pulled together to help each other.

One of the staff members to meet the Royal couple was nurse Rafael Fernandes who won a Trust competition to design a badge commemorating 2020 as International Year of the Nurse and Midwife.

Speaking after the visit, Trust Chair Graham Sims said: “We were very honoured the Duke and Duchess chose to visit the Royal Berkshire Hospital. It was a great opportunity for us to showcase the work we did during Covid and to highlight our achievements since the first wave of the pandemic and outline our plans for the future.

“We are very proud of the way the Trust has managed throughout this unprecedented period and it was very satisfying for us to get this Royal seal of approval for what we have achieved.”

Acting Chief Executive Officer Nicky Lloyd said: “The Duke and Duchess were so interested in hearing about our work at the RBH and getting a first-hand picture from our teams about what it’s been like dealing with such a major event. As Graham has said, we are so very proud of everyone here for the way they adapted so quickly to new ways of working at the height of Covid – many people redeployed to other sites, some retrained, some returned to work after retiring. The whole Trust rallied round very quickly and magnificently to make sure we continued to care for our patients and the wider community.

“I’d also like to thank local people for the way they supported us too. We felt so appreciated and that made a difficult situation a lot easier to handle,” she said.

Prior to the Royal visit to Reading it was announced the Duke and Duchess had been named Patrons of NHS Charities Together and their visit to the RBH gave them chance to find out how some of the NHS Charities Together money allocated to the Trust has been spent. This has included a major refurbishment of staff showers and changing facilities and ongoing enhancement to areas to support staff wellbeing.

They were also updated on work for a permanent Wellbeing Centre and garden for staff which is being developed opposite the hospital funded by donations from generous local donors. NHS Charities Together funding will go towards kitting out the Centre which is due to open next summer.

GET YOUR FREE FLU JAB
Ask your pharmacist, GP or midwife



Accessing your GP

A trio of short videos featuring Berkshire West GPs have been produced to reassure people that surgeries are open for business and it's important that they seek help if they spot worrying symptoms like lumps or bleeding, or they need help with managing a long term condition.

The videos feature [Dr Tom Back](#) (Reading), [Dr Heather Howells](#) (West Berkshire) and [Dr Rupa Joshi](#) (Wokingham).

They are being shared by our partners in Healthwatch and local authorities but please feel free to send them to anyone you think may find them useful.

Help Us Help You Campaign

The latest lockdown rules may have been lifted but that's unlikely to lighten the mood of people suffering mental health problems. And the run up to Christmas is also a difficult time for people suffering some form of depression or anxiety.

In light of this, health teams across Berkshire West are urging anyone with mental health worries to seek help for assessment or treatment as part of the NHS's Help Us Help You campaign.

Figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) show almost one in five adults were likely to be experiencing some form of depression during the pandemic and almost one in eight developed moderate to severe depressive symptoms. They also highlighted a marked increase in anxiety at the beginning of lockdown with almost half (49.6%) of people reporting high anxiety.

And although mental health services have been running throughout the pandemic, there was a marked dip in referrals despite evidence that coronavirus is making problems more common.

Figures for the South East show that in April only 57,814 referrals were made compared to 133,191 in April 2019. The latest figures from July show that referrals are recovering, but are still down by 11% compared to last year.

Dr Heather Howells, Mental Health lead for Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, said: "Throughout the pandemic the NHS has been here to support people struggling with their mental health and we're keen to reassure people that they aren't burdening the NHS.

"These figures from the ONS are, sadly, not surprising. The last few months have been a really difficult time for many people who are worried about their health, jobs, children's schooling, money and many other things. And if you're already weighed down with mental health issues it can make everything feel completely overwhelming.

"I really don't want people to suffer in silence. Depression, anxiety and other mental health symptoms can affect us all and can be completely isolating and frightening but there is so much help available. So please make contact with someone, be it your GP surgery, a charity specialising in mental health issues or by self-referring on line," said Dr Howells.



NHS talking therapies are a confidential service run by fully trained experts offering help with problems like stress, anxiety and depression. People can access the service by visiting their GP or referring themselves online or ringing 0300 365 2000.

There is also online support on the NHS mental health and wellbeing link www.nhs.uk and people can also seek help by going online at NHS 111

Young people aged between 11 and 18 can visit KOOOTH.com a free, anonymous and confidential online counselling and emotional wellbeing support. And for those over 18 and in urgent need of help, they should ring NHS 111 who will direct them to the right support.

There's also help for people suffering from depression or suicidal thoughts here <https://westberkshiresuicideprevention.org>

In emergency situations or if someone is in immediate danger, people must call 999 straight away.

Support for people with LongCOVID

A new service is now up and running for patients struggling with symptoms following a Covid infection.

This multidisciplinary clinic at the Royal Berkshire Hospital is for people with LongCOVID and is being run by consultants (respiratory, cardiac, acute medicine, pain medicine) from the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. Local GPs and specialist respiratory, pain and fatigue physiotherapists and psychologists will also be providing expert advice and treatment.

LongCOVID (also known as post covid syndrome) applies to patients whose symptoms are ongoing for 12 weeks after their illness. Many complain of fatigue, widespread pain, chest pain, breathlessness, gastrointestinal symptoms, tachycardia and other neurological symptoms.

Patients will be offered a one stop assessment service where suitable, and investigated thoroughly as required. After this, they will be placed along the right clinical pathway to help treat and manage the symptoms.

Dr Deepak Ravindran, Consultant in Anaesthesia, Pain and Musculoskeletal Medicine at the RBH said: "This service recognises that patients may be experiencing multiple health and social problems and will adopt a trauma informed approach to deliver integrated holistic physical and mental health assessment. Where appropriate, signposting will be done to other services in the community that are closer to home for the patient.

The treatments range from high quality respiratory rehabilitation, which can be done face to face or remotely via digital platforms, to advice on fatigue and pain and nutrition/lifestyle management. Where suitable, medication advice will be given to the patient's GP to trial and continue if beneficial.

NHS 111 First



The graphic features the NHS logo in the top right corner. Below it, a red banner contains the text "Call 111 before visiting A&E" followed by a white right-pointing arrow, and "(Emergency Department)" below it. A dark blue banner below that contains the text "We'll book you a time slot" followed by a white right-pointing arrow, and "with the best service for your healthcare needs" below it. At the bottom left, there is a paragraph of text: "If you need medical help but it's not a life-threatening emergency, call 111. Depending on your needs your advisor will either book you a time slot at the Royal Berkshire Hospital Emergency Department or at the best local service to suit your healthcare needs. This will help keep you safe and maintain social distancing." In the bottom right corner, there is a small blue triangle containing the number "111".

Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy for Berkshire West

This year, for the first time, the Health and Wellbeing Boards in Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham have joined together to produce a new 10-year plan to improve the health and wellbeing of people who live across Berkshire West.

The new strategy will be the focus for health and social care working in partnership across all three areas to improve your health and wellbeing. It is a declaration of where we all think it is important to work together to make a difference, and so will affect decisions about where money is spent and where resources are put over the next 10 years.

Please share your views by taking part in this [online survey](#).

The survey closes at 5pm on Friday 29 January 2021.

If you would like the survey in a different or more accessible format or have any queries, please email: berkshirewestwellbeing@gmail.com

Further information is available here www.berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk/jhwbs



New Counter Terrorism Policing website

Counter Terrorism Policing has launched a new safeguarding website www.actearly.uk, aimed at family and friends to encourage them to share concerns that a friend or loved one might be vulnerable to radicalisation.

The website aims to:

- Increase awareness of where to go for further information and support
- Increase awareness of the signs of radicalisation
- Increase understanding of, and confidence in, the referral process
- Encourage referrals from concerned family and friends at an early stage

