

## COVID-19 - KEEPING GP PRACTICES UPDATED

**As you will be well aware, the landscape in which we are all working is unprecedented and ever changing.**

To ensure you are kept as up-to-date as possible, in relation to any service changes at Northumbria Healthcare, we will send you a weekly bulletin. We will also send you adhoc bulletins if we have anything urgent we need you to know.

An inbox will be set up from next week for any questions you may have and we will share the email address with you next week. We will develop a frequently asked questions document and send an updated version of this document to you on a weekly basis too.

We are operating within our incident management structures, aligning with national guidance and also linking in with the wider integrated care system across the north east and north Cumbria to ensure we work collaboratively when appropriate.

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## ROUTINE OUTPATIENT APPOINTMENTS AND PLANNED AND ELECTIVE OPERATIONS

**We are now preparing to implement plans to create extra capacity within our hospitals. This will enable us to respond to the anticipated increase in patients requiring hospital admission and respiratory support.**

This includes postponing non-urgent elective and planned operations. This will be done in a phased way from next week.

We will also be postponing outpatient appointments, from early next week. Where possible we will try and do online or telephone consultations.

**GP practices should continue to make referrals and the Trust will store them on a work list in the contact centre. GPs should please advise patients that outpatient appointments are being postponed due to COVID-19. The Trust is planning to do some external communications around this next week.**

**If a referral is urgent, please make sure this is clearly marked.**

**Emergency admissions, cancer treatment and other urgent clinical care will remain unaffected.**

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## SUPPORTING GPs WITH ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Following your feedback Northumbria Healthcare is pleased to announce an evolution in the provision of referral services via the NHS e-referral service that simplifies the current consultant first referral process.

From April 2020, both North Tyneside and Northumberland CCG referrers will be able to submit requests specifically for advice and guidance which will be responded to by our consultants, or you will be able to refer directly into the wide range of consultant-led outpatient department services, via referral assessment services (RAS or Send for Triage).

This is **not management/screening** of your referral - instead it ensures your patients are booked into the most appropriate clinic or service first time.

We are aware that GPs need a mechanism whereby they can ask for advice only, and to address this need we will also be publishing a wide range of advice and guidance services, allowing GPs to ask a question and get a prompt response from secondary care.

It is our intention to respond to 75% of advice requests within five working days and 100% within 15 working days. The governance and clarity of this should be better than with Consultant First.

Where the advice response indicates that the patient needs to be seen in secondary care, we have to ask the referrer to convert the advice and guidance request into a referral and resubmit into an appropriate RAS. This will record a full history of all actions and previous conversations which will be available to both primary and secondary care staff. Practice admin staff will be able to use the 'refer now' option on the advice and guidance response, and this will not require additional letters from GPs.

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## CURRENT SERVICE CHANGES

**To ensure we further protect patients and our staff, we have made changes to the following services.**

### **Spirometry**

In line with guidance from The Association for Respiratory, Technology and Physiology (ARTP) we will only carry out **urgent pulmonary function testing with immediate effect**.

This will help to reduce travelling for this at-risk patient group and as lung function can aerosolise viruses, we are also reducing risk of infection for our staff.

If a patient needs an urgent test, these requests will continue to be accepted with clinical justification. For other patients, please treat on a clinical basis and arrange for further investigation at a later date.

<https://www.artp.org.uk/News/artp-covid19-guidelines>

If you have an urgent query, please email [mark.weatherhead@northumbria-healthcare.nhs.uk](mailto:mark.weatherhead@northumbria-healthcare.nhs.uk).

### **Steroid injections**

In line with national guidance, we are suspending all steroid injections which will include those administered via Joint Musculoskeletal and Pain Service (JMAPS).

There is a small possibility that the injection may adversely affect disease progression of a patient who has COVID-19.

### **Sexual health and stop smoking services**

To help create capacity in primary care, we have received requests from several practices to provide support to people who need sexual health care and stop smoking advice. We are happy for people to be directed to our services, please find details below.

#### **Sexual health services**

North Tyneside - 0191 297 0441

Northumberland - 01670 515151

#### **Stop smoking service (Northumberland only)**

Northumberland -; 01670 813 135

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## **TRUST PREPAREDNESS**

To ensure we are as prepared as we can be, the trust is doing the following:

- Keeping our staff as up-to-date as we can via a constant flow of information and guidance/ advice
  - Reviewing how best to ensure we have enhanced health and wellbeing support for our frontline staff
  - Providing staff with free car parking, drinks and food
  - Constantly reviewing resources, in terms of our staffing and supplies (including personal protective equipment), and putting relevant measures in place to ensure we can continue to deliver sustainable services -; including redeployment of staff where possible (with relevant training)
  - Testing -; we have a phased approach for testing priority front-line staff who have the specified symptoms, via a drive-through testing facility at North Tyneside General Hospital
  - Considering how we can recruit additional volunteers to support our staff
  - Ensuring our students who are on placement with us are supported, have access to relevant information and are clear about processes
  - Testing all patients who are admitted to hospital with a respiratory condition and isolating them until we know their results
  - Reducing the flow of people through our hospital sites by limiting the number of entrances people can use and installing handwashing facilities at entrances
  - Suspending visiting -; only children, patients who are receiving end-of-life care and our maternity patients can receive visitors. iPads will be available on wards to facilitate 'virtual' visiting and friends and relatives will be able to ring a central number for information about their loved one in hospital. Patients will soon be able to make free calls and have free access to the standard TV package via Hospedia
  - Providing a constant flow of information to our patients and the public via a range of channels
  - Providing stakeholders with relevant updates and attending and contributing to any partner meetings
  - Considering mutual aid where appropriate
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If you have a query or if there is something that you would like to be included in future editions of this newsletter please email [cara.charlton@northumbria.nhs.uk](mailto:cara.charlton@northumbria.nhs.uk)