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COVID-19 coronavirus: what to do if you need to see a GP or get medication

Whilst we're all staying at home as much as possible during the pandemic, we still need to fulfil our basic needs. Many people still require medications or need to get medical support for something other than COVID-19.

Seeing your GP

Do not attend your GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital if you think you might have COVID-19. You should [self-isolate](#) and [book a test](#) online. You can use the [NHS 111 online tool](#) to find out what to do next.

If you have a GP appointment booked, keep an eye out for communications from your surgery. Surgeries have switched to digital or telephone appointments, and will only carry out face-to-face appointments where necessary after a telephone appointment. This is to minimise the risk to vulnerable patients and clinicians if people carrying the virus go to the practice.

By video

Many practices moved rapidly at the start of the pandemic to set up video-conferencing facilities. This means that an increasing number of appointments with doctors and nurses will be carried out at a distance. Some surgeries are restricting video appointments to those who have already been assessed over the phone.

On the phone

It is likely that the phone line will be busy if you call your GP practice to book an appointment. This is because a large number of people have worries about their health condition and the implications of managing it in a pandemic. A number of clinicians also can't get into surgeries because they are ill. Practices will largely prioritise those with urgent or serious health concerns, meaning that people with routine or minor concerns may have to wait longer for appointments.

Booking online

At the outset of the first lockdown, GPs were advised by the government that nobody should be seen at the practice without a call to check they were free from possible COVID-19 symptoms. As a result, some surgeries have switched off online appointment booking so that they can ensure people with COVID-19 symptoms aren't attending the practice.

Face to face

If you do attend your surgery for an appointment, make sure to follow any instructions given to you by staff at the practice. You should continue to take precautionary measures against coronavirus whilst in the practice, as you would in any public setting.

This includes:

- Using hand sanitiser and frequently washing your hands.
- Avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Maintaining social distancing (making sure that wherever possible, there are at least two metres between you and another person).
- Wearing a face covering.

Getting your prescription

Many pharmacies are currently still open and **repeat prescriptions should be available as usual.**

If you have a repeat prescription set up already and are self-isolating, see if someone else is able to pick up the prescription for you. If you are isolating, have them drop it off outside your door so that you can avoid face-to-face contact.

Lots of pharmacies or pharmacy services offer a home delivery service. This means that you can get your medication delivered right to your door. Again, ask for the delivery to be left outside if you are isolating. **However, do be aware that some pharmacies which previously delivered are now simply too busy to offer this service.** That means you may need to make alternative arrangements if you can't collect your prescription, such as asking a neighbour to collect it.

Practices are being encouraged to put as many suitable patients on to electronic repeat dispensing as soon as they can. This will speed up the process for repeat prescriptions to be authorised.

Currently there are **no medicine shortages** as a result of COVID-19 or coronavirus. Even generic drugs like paracetamol have been stockpiled by distributors to prevent supplier issues.

Many medications were also stockpiled to prepare for Brexit, meaning that the country is prepared to prevent shortages.

Individuals are being urged not to stockpile drugs for themselves. Whilst there are currently no issues getting hold of drugs, if everyone tries to get more medication than they currently need it will put strain on the system. Practices have been advised not to issue repeat prescriptions sooner than they're due, and not to issue more than usual. That means that if you usually get a month's worth of medicines at a time, you won't be able to change to a three-month supply.

People with health conditions which require medication should ensure they have enough to see them through an isolation period (currently 10 days).

What about surgery and routine appointments?

In the first lockdown, NHS England suspended all non-urgent surgery, and most routine appointments and screening, for three months. This resulted in a huge backlog of patients waiting for non-COVID-19 treatments.

In the last few months, there has been a concerted effort to prevent further delays by keeping hospital and GP services open. However, as cases of COVID-19 rise to levels high above those seen in the first wave, many hospitals have needed to pause all non-urgent outpatient appointments and operations.

Nonetheless, you should still speak with your doctor if you have medical concerns: routine hospital appointments have not been cancelled in all areas and urgent referrals are still going ahead almost everywhere.

What if there's an emergency?

If you have a medical emergency and need an ambulance, you should continue to call 999 or the relevant emergency number in your area.

For urgent non-coronavirus medical queries which don't require an ambulance, use [NHS 111's online tool](#) or call 111 if you have no access to the internet. There will be a long wait to speak to someone because of calls about coronavirus but they will still take your call.

NHS workers, clinicians and other medical staff are working around the clock to ensure that everyone gets the care they need. The coronavirus pandemic is unprecedented and unplanned for, meaning that lots of emergency measures are being taken. Be as patient as you can with staff – they are doing their best at a very difficult time.

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