

Stakeholder briefing – NHS 111 first

New system for access to urgent NHS care in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin

This briefing is to provide you with information on safety measures we are putting in place for urgent medical services in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin to minimise the risk of transmission of Covid-19 and other infections in Emergency Departments (ED) during the Covid-19 response.

We are starting to see a rise in the number of people attending our EDs and we need to be able to see patients safely, so will be urging people to contact NHS 111 first if they think they need urgent care. This can be done online or by phone.

From 16 November, people using 111 will be referred or booked into the most suitable place for treatment, as close to home as possible. That might be any of our urgent treatment centres or minor injuries units, the nearest ED or the range of other urgent care services. This will apply both to Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin residents and to anyone visiting the area.

Those walking into ED without a referral from NHS 111 will not be turned away but may have to wait longer than someone who has already booked an appointment through 111.

Following a two-week testing period, starting on 16 November we will be launching the scheme to the public from 1 December.

Given that the success of the scheme relies on changing behaviours, communications will be critical.

The benefits of using 111 online or calling NHS 111 first are:

- People will get to speak with a senior clinician earlier; in some cases this can be via video consultation so patients can see who is advising them on their care.
- If someone needs urgent face-to-face assessment or treatment, this can be arranged there and then, without any further delay. They will know exactly where to go, and when. This will help also reduce waiting times for all patients.
- By advising people where and when to go, we can control queues/crowding and thus significantly reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

Arrangements will not change for people with serious or life-threatening illnesses or injuries. They will continue to dial 999 as before.

The new system reflects the reduced capacity for seeing patients in EDs and other treatment centres because of the pandemic, given the need to preserve social distancing, segregate people with and without Covid-19, and decontaminate premises.

The system also means people:

- are more likely to get the right treatment, first time
- should be seen quickly when they arrive for their appointment
- will be more likely to get care closer to home

This new arrangement in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin is not unique; other areas around the country are developing similar responses to the pandemic for their urgent care services. The

service is already live in several areas including Cornwall, Portsmouth and Hereford and Worcestershire and Leicestershire and Rutland. It builds on the existing role of NHS 111 in advising people on what treatment they need and where to go for it.

Our approach has been developed by hospital consultants, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, mental health specialists, the 111 team and GPs in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, using local knowledge and expertise.

More health professionals are being employed to ensure the 111 service can respond to the expected increase in demand.

The service will be reviewed and improved on an ongoing basis. The experience of patients who have used the service will help to inform any changes that need to be made.

We realise that people are used to making their own way to our urgent and emergency care facilities without using 111 first, and that this new approach will mean a significant change in behaviour. We recognise that it may take some time for people to get used to the system and to understand the benefits, both to them and to the NHS.

It is important that the message about using NHS 111 first is shared as widely as possible, from 1 December, with residents, Welsh patients and with visitors.

At that point, we would welcome your support as we try to reach all communities in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. We will provide materials to support this.

How will NHS 111 in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin operate?

Anyone phoning 111 in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin will have their details taken by a call-handler and asked an important set of initial questions, to ensure that an emergency response (for serious or life-threatening illness or injury) is not required and to gather key information.

If a clinical opinion is needed, the call-handler then passes all the information to a clinical team member who can talk to the patient. These are experienced senior clinicians, who are able to offer informed advice and/or refer the patient to the most-appropriate clinical setting.

The online version of NHS 111 works in the same way. Users will be required to complete the initial 'safety' questions, which will then trigger a call-back from a senior clinician if needed.

This new approach allows people to be referred into a wider range of services providing urgent care, increasingly with booked timeslots as the system matures. These services include:

- Local urgent treatment centres
- Local minor injury units
- Local out-of-hours GP treatment centres
- Pharmacies
- The nearest ED

NHS 111 has access to the full directory of services, including opening hours for each unit, so people are sent to the right place. Clinical advisers will increasingly be able to book patients directly into units or, where this is not possible, send through details to the unit so staff know the patient is coming.

Local health and care partners and stakeholders are also working together to develop other pathways, in particular out of hospital options.