

Dear Colleague,

Plans and Arrangements for Primary Medical Care Services During the Easter Period

Local A&E Delivery Boards are responsible for developing plans to ensure there is sufficient capacity across the system to manage the expected surge in demand throughout the year and periods of increased pressure on the health system, including Easter.

You will appreciate that primary care services are part of a much wider health and care system comprising of many interdependent services. It is therefore important that each part of the system plays its specific role in order to minimise undue pressures on any one part of the system.ki

To support CCG Easter plans, NHS England's communication plans over this period will reiterate to members of the public that GP services are available during core hours, and that A&E services are not the default.

As the commissioner of primary medical care. NHS England and CCGs with full delegated responsibility for primary medical care have responsibility to ensure patients have confidence in the availability of primary care services, including primary medical care, over the Easter period.

We therefore thought it would be helpful to set out the commissioners' expectations of primary medical care over this period.

The days leading to the Easter weekend, Monday 10 April to Thursday 13 April 2017 are normal working days. All our partner health and social care agencies are working on this basis. The expectation is that practices are open from 08:00 to 18:30 unless alternative arrangements, as described in Appendix A, are agreed in advance.

Those practices that provide Extended Hours on these days under the Directed Enhanced Service (DES) may wish to request a move of these hours to another day within the Easter period. Such requests will be checked to ensure that they are supported your CCG and align with the broader Local A&E Delivery Board plans for this period

Easter Weekend:

Those practices that provide Extended Hours over the weekend on the 15 and 16 April 2017 may wish to request a move of these hours to another day within the Easter period.

Bank Holidays:

Friday 14 and Monday 17 April 2017 are bank holidays and normal bank holiday arrangements should be in place to ensure patients can access primary medical care during this period. These arrangements may be supplemented by specific Local A&E Delivery Board led initiatives (e.g. GP at A&E) to help manage the expected surge in demand over this period.

Again, those practices that would normally provide Extended Hours on these days of the week may wish to request a move of these hours to another day within the Easter period.

To support the provision of OOH or urgent care services, NHS England has extended the winter indemnity scheme to allow GPs offering additional cover over the BH weekend period the option of getting support for any increase to their indemnity costs for April 17. For information, GPs should contact their medical defence organisation before mid-March.

We hope this communication provides clarity in relation to commissioner expectations of primary medical care over the Easter period. If there are any questions please contact the NHS England/CCG (delete as appropriate) contracting team.

Thank you for your continued support hard work and commitment to providing high quality and safe services to NHS patients.

Yours sincerely

NHS England South (South West)

Appendix A: Contractual considerations for practices

If a patient cannot speak to your Practice Receptionist during Core Hours (08:00-18:30 Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays) over the holiday period, you will need to confirm what arrangements are in place to deliver the contractual obligations.

Whilst the GMS Contract Regulations regarding the provision of core and essential services during “core hours” is not a “doors open” requirement, these provisions do impose a contractual responsibility on the Contractor for patient care during this period.

This means the practice retains responsibility for ensuring the care provided during core hours is appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of your patients. It is not acceptable to close the doors and rely on an answer machine message advising patients to contact another provider where no prior arrangements have been made (e.g. contact 111 or attend A&E).

If the practice is “doors closed” during core hours, then patients need to have clarity about how to access essential services. As a minimum, you will need to have a system in place so that patients can access GP services, including urgent care, either by ringing the surgery and:

1. Being able to talk directly to a clinician to ascertain how they can access services if they need to;
2. An answer-phone message signposting the patient to an on-call GP for the practice.

If the on-call GP arrangement is part of a service commissioned by the CCG (e.g. using the OOH service in-hours) then this must be with prior written agreement with both the provider and the CCG commissioner of that service.

In addition the Contract Regulations require a practice to notify their commissioner of their proposal to sub-contract. Where this is the case the commissioner will need to be assured that such an arrangement will deliver essential medical services during core hours otherwise the commissioner will be unable to accept the proposal.

Given the pressures that OOHs providers already face during this holiday period it may not be reasonable or a sustainable service option to close early prior to the bank holidays and expect the OOH provider to provide cover.

In summary practices are expected to be open from 08:00 to 18:30, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays, unless alternative arrangements are agreed in advance as described in Appendix A. If these arrangements are not in place, or if tested they fail, this may amount to a breach of your contract.

Appendix B – preparation checklist for bank holiday (BH) periods

- Plans are in place to ensure the identification of high risk community based patients and to profile their care management over the extended holiday period appropriately.
- The fax is operational throughout.
- The telephone divert arrangements are updated for the bank holidays and a staff member is scheduled to check that the phones are still working properly over the course of the 4 day bank holiday
- Third party call handling divert arrangements are updated – where used and are successfully operational.
- Ensure that any changes to access times are clearly advertised on NHS Choices/practice website/in practice. If the practice uses a pre-recorded message when patients telephone, you may wish to consider using this to remind patients about changes for the holiday period.
- In the weeks before the BH period, highlight to patients the need to plan for sufficient repeat medication to cover them for the BH period. Information to patients could include pharmacy opening times over the Easter period.
- Check Business Continuity Plans are up-to-date, particularly ensuring that contact details for local health organisations are correct.