

Date: 27th November 2019

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Dear Colleague,

Winter Plans and Arrangements for Primary Medical Care Services during the Christmas and New Year Period

Last winter was again challenging for the NHS; however, with thanks to the huge efforts of frontline primary care staff, more people were seen in primary care than ever before, including at peak times of demand over the weekend and bank holiday periods thanks to the new extended access services covering the whole of the country.

As you will be aware, Local A&E Delivery Boards are responsible for developing plans to ensure that there is sufficient capacity across the system to manage the expected surge in demand over the winter period, including Christmas and New Year.

Primary Care Services play a fundamental role in managing winter demands as part of the wider health and care system which has many interdependent services. It is important that each part of the system plays a role to minimise undue pressures on any one part of the system.

Primary Care Networks (PCNs) present a new opportunity to ensure general practice has a stronger voice in our local preparations for winter and Clinical Directors have an opportunity to get involved in shaping system plans. However, we recognise that many PCNs are at a very early stage of development and conscious of this demand on Clinical Directors time, there is no requirement for PCNs to contribute to the development of winter plans in 2019 and 2020.

As the commissioner of Primary Care Services NHS England and CCGs have the responsibility to ensure patients have confidence in the availability of primary care services, including Primary Medical, Dental and Community Pharmacy, over the Christmas and New Year period. I thought it would be helpful to set out expectations for Primary Medical Care over this period as follows.

Christmas and New Year's Eve:

Christmas and New Year's Eve, Tuesday 24th and Tuesday 31st December 2019 are **normal working days**. All our partner health and social care agencies are working on this basis. The expectation is that practices will be open from 08:00 to 18:30 as usual.

Primary Care Networks providing Extended Hours on these days under the Directed Enhanced Service (DES) may wish to move these hours to another day within the Christmas and New Year period to better meet assessed patient demand¹.

We would also like to remind practices and PCNs of the importance to ensure there is capacity and availability to deal with same day repeat prescriptions in order to enable patients presenting on Christmas Eve to collect their prescription.

Weekends and Bank Holidays over Christmas and New Year:

PCN provision of Extended Hours over the weekend on the 21st and/or 22nd December 2019 and 28th and/or 29th December 2019 and bank holidays may again be moved to another day. The principles as outlined for Christmas and New Year's Eve apply.

Wednesday 25th and Thursday 26th December 2019 and Wednesday 1st January 2020 are bank holidays and **normal bank holiday arrangements** are in place to ensure that patients can access primary medical care during this period. This includes 7 Day Access appointments and Out of Hours provision.

- [Community Pharmacist Consultation Service](#) including urgent medicine supply services and (as referred via 111) assess symptoms of minor illnesses or advice about health and well-being
- Litherland Walk in Centre
- Dental Out of Hours - <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/dental-health/how-can-i-access-an-nhs-dentist-in-an-emergency-or-out-of-hours/>
- 7 Day Access
- Out of Hours Provision

It will also be beneficial for all practices to hold information for sign posting to other local primary care services over the holiday period, including considering links on practice websites, such as:

South Sefton CCG: <https://www.southseftonccg.nhs.uk/your-health-and-services/>

Southport and Formby CCG: <https://www.southportandformbyccg.nhs.uk/your-health-and-services/>

¹ The DES is clear any cancellation of extended hours access appointments, including arrangements for re-provision (e.g. bank holidays) should be re-offered within a two-week period around the original appointments and all patients within the PCN must be notified.

We hope that this communication provides clarity in relation to commissioner expectations of Primary Medical Care over the Christmas and New Year period. If there are any questions, please contact the CCG Primary Care team using the ccg.sefton@nhs.net email account.

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

Yours sincerely,



Fiona Taylor
Chief Officer



Dr Kati Scholtz
Primary Care Clinical
Lead

Appendix A – preparation checklist for Christmas and New Year period

Task	Responsibility	Completed
1. 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.		
2. Email is operational throughout.		
3. All telephone divert arrangements are updated for holidays and a staff member is contactable/scheduled to check that the phones are still working properly over the course of the Christmas and New year weekend and bank holiday periods and can remedy any faults / issues if needed.		
4. Third party call handling divert arrangements are updated – where used and are successfully operational.		
5. 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.		
6. In the weeks before the Bank Holiday (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 Christmas period.		
7. Check Business Continuity Plans are up-to-date, particularly ensuring that contact details for local health organisations are correct.		
8. PCNs change to Extended Hours have been checked and confirmed to ensure fit with local winter plans.		
9. Extended hours changes are advertised and notified to patients in advance of changes taking affect.		
10. Have all staff been offered flu vaccine		
11. Are plans in place to cover last minute sickness/absence		