

For key stakeholders, staff and clinicians: Changes to Urgent and Emergency Care in London: Sept 2020

A series of initiatives are taking place to transform the London Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) landscape, making it easier and safer for patients to get the right treatment at the right time and preventing a return to previous overcrowding in Emergency Departments (EDs)/ Accident and Emergency Departments (A&Es). This is especially important in light of Covid-19 and the continuing risk of infection to patients and hospital staff.

The two most significant are the 111 First programme and a rapid expansion of Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC).

Both focus on patients being referred to the most appropriate urgent or emergency service for their needs, helping them avoid waiting around to be seen. If an ED/A&E is needed, an appointment can be booked via 111.

To support these initiatives and any increased pressure as we go into the winter period, capacity in the 111 service has been expanded significantly. This means that more doctors, nurses, pharmacists, paramedics, dental nurses and trained health advisors than ever before will be available to respond to Londoners' health needs. Around 2,500 staff look after Londoners as part of the 111 service, 24/7 365 days of the year; this number will be expanded by 644, including 166 more doctors, nurses, pharmacists and paramedics.

In addition, the London region has secured £49.6m capital investment to protect against infections originating in hospitals by expanding waiting areas and space within EDs/A&Es and SDEC facilities. Work is already underway on these changes, and they are all expected to be in place by 1 January 2021, ahead of the busiest winter months.

This new arrangement in London is not unique; other areas around the country are developing similar responses to the pandemic for their urgent and emergency care services.

About NHS 111

NHS 111 helps people get the right physical and mental health advice and treatment when they urgently need it – and in London, the service now handles over 3 million calls per year with the average call taking eight minutes to be resolved.

Using a clinical assessment tool (NHS Pathways) designed by leading doctors, trained health advisors give advice based on a patient's health needs, refer them to the most appropriate care, or send an ambulance in case of an emergency.

The health advisors are supported by clinicians who can step in whenever required. More than two thirds of Londoners who call the 111 service speak to a nurse, doctor, pharmacist or paramedic, and just one in ten patients need to be referred to an ED/A&E.

Working closely with other NHS services, NHS 111 can make direct appointments at 93% of London's GP surgeries, 100% of GP Hubs and all Urgent Treatment Centres (UTC). The service can also refer to over 1,600 London pharmacies for urgent and repeat medication advice. Callers experiencing a mental health crisis will be assessed and transferred to local mental health crisis services to ensure they receive timely specialist mental health support. Callers with urgent dental issues are quickly routed to a dental nurse service who can advise on pain management and book them into an emergency dental appointment, if needed.

111 Clinicians (GPs, nurses, paramedics and pharmacists) also have access to individual care plans, mental health crisis plans and lists of shielded patients, which means that they can deliver the best and most efficient care possible.

If someone calls 111 more than once, information about their original call will be available to the health advisor to prevent people having to repeat themselves.

111 First – increasing 111 capacity and capability

The 111 First Programme will bring a new approach to streaming patients into urgent care settings. It aims to get people to contact NHS 111 first - whether online or by phone - if they think they need to attend an ED/A&E to treat an urgent, but not serious or life-threatening medical need.

The new system reflects the new safety measures for seeing patients in an ED/A&E and other treatment centres because of the pandemic, preventing the spread of infection by preserving social-distancing, and separating people with and without Covid,

In London, NHS 111 is already able to book appointments for patients at the majority of UTCs and this is being expanded to include all London EDs/A&Es.

From 30 September, people contacting 111 that are local to five hospital sites in London (Royal London Hospital, North Middlesex Hospital, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital Woolwich, Croydon University Hospital) and who are assessed as needing to attend an ED/A&E, will be advised where they need to go for treatment and a timeslot will be booked for them. This service will expand to more sites in two waves, with the aim of covering the whole of London by 1 December.

If people do make their own way to EDs/A&Es and UTCs, they will continue to be seen. Patients needing emergency treatment will be prioritised, however those whose conditions are not as urgent may need to wait elsewhere or will be asked to return for a later appointment. Using 111 first will ensure that patients get quicker, safer care in the right environment and will help us to better control the risk of the virus spreading.

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

111 First will bring several improvements for Londoners:

- People will get to speak with a clinician earlier, and get the right treatment first time
- If someone contacting NHS 111 needs urgent face-to-face assessment or treatment, this can be arranged there and then, without any further delay. Patients will know exactly where to go, and when. This will help to also reduce waiting times for all patients
- By advising people where and when to go, queues/crowding in ED/A&E waiting rooms can be controlled and the risk of coronavirus transmission significantly reduced
- People will be more likely to get appropriate care closer to home

London's approach has been developed by hospital consultants, GPs, nurses, paramedics pharmacists, social workers, mental health specialists, NHS 111 teams in the capital, using local knowledge and expertise. NHS 111 will also be able to schedule patients into Same Day Emergency Care services later this year, bypassing the need to attend ED/A&E altogether.

Implementation of 12 Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) pathways

SDEC is the provision of same day care for emergency patients with certain conditions who would otherwise be admitted to hospital.

Patients presenting at hospital with relevant conditions can be rapidly assessed, diagnosed and treated without being admitted to a ward, and if clinically safe to do so, will go home the same day their care is provided.

For example, a child with chronic asthma will have access to the care they need without having to be admitted to a busy ward or sit in a waiting area with other sick people. They can then return home the same day, if clinically safe to do so.

In London, implementation of 12 SDEC pathways that make up 60% of SDEC activity are being accelerated with an immediate focus on high risk groups such as pregnant women with hyperemesis gravidarum and children with asthma. This means that wherever you are in London, the high-quality care will be the same.