

Winter is coming

The winter is a particularly challenging time for the NHS. These pressures not only affect hospitals, but also significantly increase the demands on your local general practice. There are no extra resources available to GP surgeries in Scotland over the winter time – as the extra money is needed to care for the most seriously ill in hospital.

Your GP wants to still be readily available for those who are acutely ill, those who might have early symptoms of cancer and need urgent referral to hospital, and to ensure the ongoing care of those with chronic illnesses or complex medical needs.

So how can we all work together to ensure there are enough GP appointments for those who really need to see a GP this winter?

What can you do to reduce chances of getting ill?

Is there anywhere else to get advice from?

PREVENTION. Prevention really is better than cure!

Flu prevention.

All of our 'at risk' patients will be offered a flu jab. We are still waiting for the delivery schedules from the vaccine supplier to the NHS, but as soon as we have confirmation of when we will receive our deliveries we will write out to eligible patients inviting them to attend for the flu jab.

Unpaid carers are also entitled to a NHS flu jab – please contact the surgery to register as a carer in order to be invited.

Pharmacists can also offer the flu vaccine on a private patient basis (cost is approx. £10) to those adults who do not qualify for a free NHS vaccine, if you wish to be vaccinated.

Keep warm.

There is evidence that being cold can increase the chances of a heart attack, stroke and chest infections. Keep your house warm enough (bedroom should be at least 18', with the main living area being a few degrees warmer). Wear lots of layers and try and keep moving as much as possible. Regular hot meals and drinks will keep you warm. If you are struggling to afford to keep your house warm enough please seek advice from Citizen's Advice Scotland as there may be help available.

Keep your bugs to yourself!

Both influenza and the winter vomiting bug (norovirus) are infectious diseases. Norovirus remains highly infectious until 48 hours after symptoms settle. Please don't send your child to school with these illnesses, and don't go to work as your work colleagues won't thank you for it when they get ill too! We have already had to deal with our first norovirus outbreak this year with the virus spreading quickly via children at school.

Falls prevention

Take care when out and about in the ice and snow. Dress for the occasion with warm clothing and shoes with a good grip. We can all have a role in making sure our more vulnerable neighbours are warm and fed if they can't get out due to risk of slipping.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE MEDICATION YOU NEED AT HOME.

Home remedies.

Stock up your medicine cabinet with in date supplies for winter – paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain and fever, a soothing cough syrup and sore throat pastilles can be handy - the local pharmacist can advise on this.

Repeat medication.

Make sure you have a good supply of your regular medication to avoid last minute requests for scripts from the emergency doctor, and only order the medicines you need. Remember the local pharmacist can provide an emergency supply of your regular medication if you should run out unexpectedly.

Asthmatic patients/ patients with COPD.

Make sure you have plenty of both types of inhalers – preventers and relievers. Our asthma/COPD nurse can advise you on how to step up/ step down your treatment during flare ups – if you are overdue your annual check up it might be worth booking in for some up to date advice. Many of you will have ‘rescue’ medicines at home (steroids/antibiotics) – it is worth checking you can find these easily and that they are still in date.

SEEKING ADVICE ON SYMPTOMS

Please don't worry – your GP will be there for you if you need them!

But there are a number of options you could try first without the need for a GP appointment.

On-line.

NHS Scotland has an online resource to check your symptoms out, to help decide when you should self care and when you should seek help. It is found as www.nhsinform.scot from there follow the ‘self help guide’ link.

Local Pharmacist.

Most coughs and colds, sore throats and earache don't need antibiotics – but we all agree it is still a miserable time being ill. Plenty of rest, and making sure you are drinking enough are important. Our local pharmacist can advise on self care for a variety of minor illnesses and ailments and treatment can be provided through over the counter medication, or may be free through the “Minor Ailments’ service.

Examples include coughs, colds, sore throats, minor skin conditions, acne, athlete's foot, styes and minor eye infections, head lice, pain including back ache, cold sores, diarrhoea and constipation, colic thrush, and emergency contraception. The pharmacy also offers an NHS stop smoking service, blood pressure testing (free) and diabetes screening (free).

Dental Hotline

All dental emergencies should be seen by a dentist (not a GP) – please contact the helpline on 0845 644 2271 for help to access the emergency dental services.

Muscle or joint problem?

The NHS Musculoskeletal Advice and Triage service (MATS) will assist you with access to online advice on self care and exercises and access to a physiotherapist if needed. Please phone 0800 917 9390 (please note calls can take approximately 15 minutes)

Health Centre Reception team “Signposting”.

In response to the increasingly complex NHS and the number of health care professionals available, our reception staff have been trained in ‘signposting’. Please don't be offended if our receptionist asks a little bit more than you are used to about your condition – they are not being nosy – they just want to get you seen by the right person. There are many ‘open access’ services available to patients now, and you don't need to see a GP first – so we may be able to help you get seen quicker by arranging an appointment with another member of the team.

Our receptionists might advise an appointment with the nurse practitioner, optician, physiotherapist, or pharmacist instead and will help you access these services. Our nurse practitioner is very experienced, and can assess and prescribe for a number of acute and chronic

conditions. We have an open access physiotherapy assessment clinic once a week run by a senior physiotherapist, and an optician on site 2 days a week who can assess urgent eye conditions (and refer to hospital if necessary).

The reception team can also help with information on how to self refer to the Smoking Cessation Adviser and the Podiatrist, and on how to contact the District Nurses, the Health Visitor, the School Nurse and the Community Midwife.

I have a 'bad' cold - so when should I see a GP?

Most upper respiratory tract infections are viral and are self limiting and antibiotics are not needed. We all have a role in being 'guardians' of our antibiotics to reduce the chances of bacteria becoming resistant to them.

On average a viral middle ear infection will be better after 4 days, a sore throat by 7 days, sinusitis by 18 days, and a cough by 21 days without the need for an antibiotic.

If you do not feel better, or you feel worse after this length of time, contact your GP practice for advice.

Antibiotics are needed for serious illness and your GP wants you to make prompt contact for advice **if you start feeling a lot worse or you develop symptoms of concern.**

The triage doctor (or nurse) is available for advice from 8:30 am until 10am every morning, and 1:30pm until 2:15pm every afternoon, with the duty doctor being available for urgent advice out with these times.

Out of hours urgent advice/assessment can be arranged via NHS 24 by phoning 111.

If in any doubt and you are concerned you or a family member has symptoms of a serious illness please do seek medical advice. The above self help guidance is intended for minor illnesses and minor ailments only.