

**23 November 2021**

## **Open letter to all Sheffield Residents**

As you may have heard on the news or read online, there are currently unprecedented pressures across our health services in Sheffield. This is in common with most areas of the country and is leading to huge levels of demand for GP services.

You may have struggled to get in touch with your GP practice recently or had to wait for an appointment. We understand that this can be frustrating, especially if you are feeling ill. This has sometimes led to the misperception that practices are not seeing many patients. We want to reassure you that practices are doing all they can to get through to and see as many patients as possible.

Surgeries in Sheffield have worked incredibly hard to provide services throughout the COVID-19 crisis and continue to do so. We are very proud of how practice staff have responded to these challenges to care for you. This is at the same time as giving 382,510 people, two doses of the lifesaving covid vaccination since December.

For everyone's safety and to ensure we continue to provide care, the way we respond to patients has had to change during the pandemic. England is still in the middle of a pandemic with very high rates of covid which are increasing in Sheffield day by day.

At the current time, our practice teams are working hard to protect patients and their staff from the deadly COVID-19 virus and stop the spread.

Many more video and telephone consultations are taking place to protect everyone and prioritise those most in need. We know many patients like not having to attend their surgery in person when the problem can be safely dealt with remotely. Not only do most patients like telephone and online appointments, but they also stop covid from spreading and staff can get through to more patients, including those with urgent health needs.

For these reasons, we see fewer patients face-to-face, but if you are assessed as needing a face-to-face appointment or if you request one you will still have one although you may have to wait a bit longer in some cases.

We want everyone to understand that we're busy and what we're doing in Sheffield to improve access. We also need your support to help us and help yourselves.

### **What we're doing**

GP surgeries are working hard to cope with the additional demand which includes bringing in more staff in different professional roles to help. Extra funding and support are also being shared across South Yorkshire to make even more appointments available.

NHS Sheffield CCG has invested in more evening and weekend appointments at extended access hubs across the City and are investing more in technology to improve communication and efficiency.

The CCG are also offering support to individual practices who may be struggling with staffing shortages or other problems to help them to continue to provide services.

### **Help us to help you**

The public has given incredible support to the NHS during the pandemic but it's not over yet and we still need your help.

When you're unwell, A&E can seem like the quickest solution, but that's not always the case. Only go to A&E or call 999 in an emergency life threatening situation. If your issue isn't an emergency, there's are more appropriate services for you to choose from:

- GP Hubs, which are open outside of your usual GP opening times
- The Minor Injuries Unit
- The Walk-in Centre

A trip to the pharmacist can also get you the same high level of care, but more quickly. Your local pharmacist can help and advice on the best treatment, they can also help you decide whether you need to see a doctor.

If you need to see a GP when your practice is closed, you can access the GP out of hours service known as GP Hubs. There are a range of NHS urgent and routine healthcare services available on weekday evenings and at weekends through hubs across Sheffield that are open 365 days a year. You can book appointments for these services through your usual GP practice or by contacting NHS 111 when your GP practice is closed.

If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, please don't visit a surgery or pharmacy without first taking a test, [using the information here](#).

While we know being poorly or injured can be stressful and concerning for patients and their families, please be kind to practice staff. We ask you to treat your doctors, their staff, and other visitors courteously and act reasonably at all times.

*Thank you for your continuing support, from Sheffield's Primary Care Clinical Leaders*