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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, but we are keen to keep PCNs informed.

There is a Birmingham and Solihull winter communications and engagement plan that is being implemented by all health and social care organisations from October 2019 to March 2020; support from general practice to support the successful delivery plan would be greatly appreciated.

Therefore, in order to ensure that our patients have the latest information about staying well and accessing the most appropriate local service for their needs, communications materials will be shared directly with all Birmingham and Solihull practice managers via email, by the CCG's communications team. We would ask that these materials are used on practices websites, social media, waiting room screens, newsletters, noticeboards and any other available communications channels, wherever

appropriate. We would also ask that practices share content that is communicated via the CCG's Facebook and Twitter accounts, where possible.

For any communications related enquiries or support, please contact [bsol.comms@nhs.net](mailto:bsol.comms@nhs.net).

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 24<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> 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 and will take telephone calls throughout this period to continue to meet the reasonable needs of their patients (unless alternative arrangements, as described in Appendix A, are agreed in advance with the CCG. Practices are reminded that transferring calls to 111 services during normal working hours is not appropriate due to the unnecessary pressure this places on other services.

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 demand<sup>1</sup>.

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 over Christmas and New Year:**

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

### **Bank Holidays:**

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> December 2018 and Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 are bank holidays and **normal bank holiday arrangements** should be in place to ensure that patients can access primary medical care during this period. These arrangements may be supplemented by specific Local A&E Delivery Board led initiatives to help manage the expected surge in demand over this period.

Again, PCNs that would normally provide Extended Hours on these days of the week may wish to move these hours to another day within the Christmas and New Year period to help manage demand.

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**Sharing Information:**

If PCNs Extended Hours sessions need to be changed due to falling on one of the days listed above please ensure patients are informed in advance, by utilising patient communications, practice websites etc.

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:

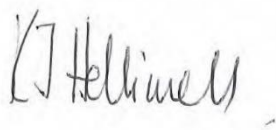
Dental out of hours

- [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
- Urgent Care Centres, Minor Injury Units, Walk-In-Centres/Urgent Treatment Centres
- Local Extended Access Services
- Any additional CCG commissioned capacity/activity, if applicable

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 contracting team ([bsolpc.contracts@nhs.net](mailto:bsolpc.contracts@nhs.net)).

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

Yours sincerely



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**Director of Integration**

**NHS Birmingham and Solihull CCG**

## **Appendix A: Contractual considerations for GP practices**

If you plan any changes 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 essential and additional 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 that the practice retains responsibility for ensuring that 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 planning to close during core hours, then patients need to have clarity about how to access services. As a minimum, you will need to have a system in place so that patients can access the services listed below. These services have been distilled following engagement with patient groups and patient representatives so whilst not explicit in the contract these represent in broad terms the types of services that we expect will be in place to meet the reasonable needs of your patients;

- Ability to attend a pre-bookable appointment (face to face)
- Ability to book / cancel appointments
- Ability to collect/order a prescription
- Access urgent appointments / advice as clinically necessary
- Home visit (where clinically necessary)
- Ring for telephone advice
- Ability to be referred to other services where clinically urgent (including for example suspected cancer).
- Ability to access urgent diagnostics and take action in relation to urgent results

These will be accessible 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 service for the practice.

If the on-call GP service 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. This notification should be made at least 28 days prior to the commencement of the sub-contract.

Providers of urgent and emergency care, including GP OOHs, have previously expressed concern about early closing of general practices at Christmas and New Year and the potential impact on them. Given the pressures that the urgent and emergency care system already faces during this period, this may not be a reasonable or sustainable service option.

In summary practices are expected to be open from 08:00 to 18:30, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays, unless alternative arrangements are notified in advance. 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 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. PCN changes to Extended Hours provision have been informed by local assessment of data on winter demand		
9. PCNs change to Extended Hours have been checked and confirmed to ensure fit with local winter plans.		
10. Extended hours changes are advertised and notified to patients in advance of changes taking affect.		
11. Have all staff been offered flu vaccine		
12. Are plans in place to cover last minute sickness/absence		