**COVID-19 White label internal communications**

**Background**

COVID-19 is the name given to the virus that emerged in China and, until recently, was known simply as Coronavirus. The number of those affected by the virus is increasing however the impact on the UK has, to date, been relatively limited. However we have now entered a period where social distancing measures are required and therefore this will begin to affect the advice given to patients and customers and also the operation of pharmacies themselves. The current official risk level is high and the Government has strengthened the legal powers they have to manage this situation.

**Government advice**

The latest government advice can always be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

Guidance for Health professionals is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-guidance-to-assist-professionals-in-advising-the-general-public/guidance-to-assist-professionals-in-advising-the-general-public>

**Advice to customers/ patients**

If you are asked for advice it is extremely important that you remain professional and avoid causing any alarm. The advice for patients changed on 23rd March.

All members of the public, customers and patients should stay at home with minimal reasons to leave home. One of these reasons, though, includes coming to the pharmacy to collect medicines. On 16th April the ‘lockdown’, which had started on 23rd March, was extended for (possibly at least) another 3 weeks.

On the 12th of May the ‘lockdown’ was eased slightly in ENGLAND ONLY; people are still required to maintain social distancing but should return to work if they cannot work from home and their employer has been able to take health and safety steps to protect the workforce. Public transport can be used if people cannot get to work any other way.

Community Pharmacy colleagues are classed as Key Workers. This means community pharmacy teams can come to work if they do not fall into a vulnerable category (see 8 below). The police have powers to stop people outside the home. It is recommended that you carry a copy of the key worker letter circulated recently regarding access to school for key worker’s children (see below) as proof that you are a key worker available at **INTERNAL**. It may also be that you have a smartcard, uniform, name-badge, etc. which would also help prove your identity.

If patients or staff develop a new continuous cough and/or have a high temperature they should stay at home for 7 days in self isolation, if they live alone. On the 18th May, anosmia (loss of or change to your sense of smell) was added to the COVID symptoms. A person’s sense of taste can also be affected as the two senses are often linked.

If they live with other all members of the household should stay a home for 14 days. The 14 day period starts from the day when the first person in the house becomes ill. After 7 days, if the first person in the household to become ill feels better and no longer has a high temperature, they can return to their normal routine. If any other family members become unwell during the 14-day household-isolation period, they should follow the same advice - that is, after 7 days of their symptoms starting, if they feel better and no longer have a high temperature, they can also return to their normal routine.

Should a household member develop coronavirus symptoms late in the 14-day household-isolation period (for example, on day 13 or day 14) the isolation period does not need to be extended, but the person with the new symptoms has to stay at home for 7 days. Public Health England have published guidance about how to self isolate along with an illustration document regarding periods of isolation. It can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>.

People should practice social distancing measures. This includes trying to stay more than 2m away from other people where possible and especially for any length of time. Where people can work from home they should do this. People should only travel if their journey is essential (e.g. to supermarket or pharmacy) or if they are a key worker (see above).

In addition, patients over 70, pregnant women and those with certain medical conditions should consider staying at home and not going out as much as possible. Where these patients must go out they should try to do so to minimise contact with others e.g. by going to the supermarket at a quiet time, avoiding the use of public transport, etc. Public Health England has produced further more detailed guidance [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults)

There are about 1.4m people in the UK who have diseases which lower their immune system or have specific other conditions who will be contacted by the NHS. These patients should not go out at all and should remain ‘shielded’ in their home. Pharmacies are asked, where these patients have no other mechanism of support to prioritise them for delivery of medication (see also ‘deliveries’ section, below).

Patients are encouraged NOT to call NHS 111 for minor symptoms. Only if symptoms worsen should they contact a health professional.

There have been concerns in the media about the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) in relation to Covid-19. On the 14th April an Expert Working Group concluded there is currently insufficient evidence to establish a link between use of ibuprofen and susceptibility to contracting COVID-19 or the worsening of its symptoms. Therefore, paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken when self-medicating for COVID-19 symptoms and patients should [follow NHS advice.](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/what-to-do-if-you-or-someone-you-live-with-has-coronavirus-symptoms) More details can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-on-human-medicines-advice-on-ibuprofen-and-coronavirus-covid-19)

Where a member of staff is required to isolate the normal company sickness notification rules must be followed. If you have any HR queries these should be direct to the HR department.

From Friday 20th March all schools will be closing until further notice, however children who are vulnerable or children of key workers such as NHS workers will still be able to attend. This includes pharmacy workers. Further information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

**Contact details for NHS organisations**

* England – log onto [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk) or call NHS 111
* Wales - phone 111 Wales or NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47
* Scotland - phone their GP or NHS 24 on 111 out of hours.
* Northern Ireland, call 0300 200 7885.

**Customers/ patients should be encouraged to:**

* Always carry tissues and use them to catch a cough or sneeze.
* Bin the tissue safely in a bin.
* To kill germs, wash hands with soap and warm water or use a sanitiser gel.

Patients should NOT stockpile medicines (see below)

You should display a Catch it. Kill it. Bin it. poster in a patient facing area of the pharmacy. These are available from INTERNAL DETAILS

You should also display the required door posters/ social distancing materials available from INTERNAL DETAILS

**Advice for pharmacy colleagues**

1. **Appoint a Covid-19 Lead in your pharmacy to ensure all members of the Team are aware of the latest guidance to follow.**

Each Pharmacy should have a lead for Covid-19 to ensure all team members are aware of the latest guidance and implementing it with the Team. This should be your Pharmacist Manager or your branch governance lead who will work with the Superintendent’s Team as needed.

The GPhC and other regulators have written to advise that in highly challenging circumstances, professionals may need to depart from established procedures. See the full statement [here](https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/news/how-we-will-continue-regulate-light-novel-coronavirus-covid-19?utm_campaign=covid-19-joint-statement-mar20&utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social). Before departing from established procedures you should talk to your Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office to obtain guidance.

1. **Catch it, kill it, bin it**

The simplest way to prevent onward transmission of the virus is good hygiene. You must ensure that:

* You wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. If you have washed your hands properly following this guidance you do NOT need to use hand sanitiser as well; sanitiser is for when normal hand-washing is not available.
* You use a disposable tissue to catch a cough or sneeze, immediately discard it into the waste bin and wash your hands with soap and warm water.
* You must ensure waste from the waste bin is disposed of in a bin liner which is tied to prevent waste spilling out. Wash your hands with soap and warm water after disposing of waste bags.
* You must clean surfaces which have had patient contact more regularly throughout the day using an appropriate sanitiser/ disinfectant/ alcohol surface wipes available from [delete as appropriate INTERNAL DETAILS]

You should display a Catch it. Kill it. Bin it. poster in a colleague area of the pharmacy. These are available from [INTERNAL DETAILS]

1. **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Pharmacies should now have received supplies of PPE. If you have not received any please contact INTERNAL for advice.

PPE should be used when:

* Entering a room, in an emergency, that contains someone who is infected or is suspected to be and;
* Disinfecting the pharmacy section 9c below.

PHE recently updated its PPE guidance. This has resulted in some confusion on other occasions when PPE should be worn. Please refer to INTERNAL GUIDANCE regarding wearing PPE in our pharmacies.

Face masks will be replenished from your usual wholesaler. Advice on how to put on (don) and take off (doff) PPE is available at INTERNAL DETAILS

When disposing of PPE, the following best practice should be considered. Used PPE unlikely to be contaminated can be placed directly into the normal general waste. Used PPE, disposable wipes and tissues which could potentially be contaminated i.e. when in contact with someone who has suspected/confirmed COVID, or from cleaning should be:

* Carefully placed in a plastic rubbish bag and tied
* Placed in a second bin bag which is tied when full
* Stored safely away from areas where colleagues may come into direct contact with it
* Left untouched for 72 hours before placing in the normal general waste.

You should have a spill kit in your pharmacy. If you don’t have one please order one. You may consider the use of gloves when interacting with patients in the consultation room but this does not remove the requirement for proper handwashing.

If you are a pharmacy in England and you have not received your PPE equipment please contact 0800 915 9964 (opening hours: Monday to Friday 08:00-18:00) or email supplydisruptionservice@nhsbsa.nhs.uk,

1. **Deliveries to infected patients or those suspected of infection**

Regular deliveries to patients can continue. Where a person who has self-isolated themselves requests a delivery, a family member, friend or neighbour (who is not self-isolated) should be encouraged to come to the pharmacy to collect the medicines. If this is not possible then a delivery can be considered.

However, additional steps should be taken when a delivery is made to an address where a person has been isolated:

* Pharmacy colleagues should contact the patient to tell them that the delivery is coming and agree a safe place to leave the delivery. This agreed safe place should be documented on the delivery record and on the PMR. The safe place should be outside the premises such as a porch or front step)
* The delivery should be left in the agreed safe place and the patient immediately phoned to confirm it has been delivered. If possible, the person making the delivery should observe, from a safe distance, the patient collecting the package from the safe place.
* The person making the delivery and the patient or their representative (who may be isolated with them) must not come into contact with each other.
* The person making the delivery must use hand sanitiser when leaving the patient’s property to clean their hands.

NB. It is possible that standard delivery procedures such as gaining signatures for deliveries could be relaxed. Ensure you look out for messages from Head Office on this subject.

Commissioned delivery services in England and Scotland, mainly to shielded patients, have or are being rolled out. Please refer to INTERNAL GUIDANCE for more information regarding our involvement in delivery services and the information that needs to be recorded.

A volunteer delivery service and a Royal Mail option are available in Wales. Contact Head Office for more information on whether this service is to be offered.

1. **Services**
	1. **Supervised Consumption**

Where a prescription states supervised consumption we recommend that the medication is placed within the consultation room with the colleague leaving the room before the patient can enter. The patient must then take the medication leaving the bottle or packaging within the room to be collected by the colleague once the patient has left. Should a substance misuse patient have to self-isolate, you must contact their drugs team to advise they cannot enter the Pharmacy during their isolation period and agreement made that a representative can collect with a note and relevant ID if required.

Substance Misuse Services have undertaken a review of how to manage these patients. Changes may include the removal of the need to supervise patients and/or reduction in the number days patients are required to attend. Ensure you check your emails regularly to ensure you are aware of the most up to date communications from your local substance misuse team.

* 1. **MAS in Scotland** - Community pharmacy contractors will be able to offer MAS consultations to additional groups presenting at the pharmacy, effective immediately.
1. **Social Distancing in a pharmacy**

There are a number of physical measures to protect staff within our Pharmacies. Please refer to guidance issued by INTERNAL GUIDANCE

1. **Consultation room**

Use of the consultation room must only be conducted where strictly necessary to reduce the risk to colleagues. However should it be felt to be appropriate to take a patient to the consultation room a risk assessment must be undertaken based on the health risk the patient may present, as well as workload within the Pharmacy at the time.

1. **Staff Colleagues over 70 or in vulnerable groups**

There is special government guidance for staff who are pregnant, aged 70+ or have a chronic disease. Please contact HR INTERNAL

1. **What to do if:**
	1. **You, a colleague or a locum has symptoms of COVID-19**

All employees with COVID-19 symptoms should follow the stay-at-home guidance given to the public. Normal sickness procedures must be followed. If you have HR queries please contact HR support at HR CONTACT DETAILS. Each country has slightly differing advice regarding testing and which members of the pharmacy team can be tested. Please contact INTERNAL for further guidance if you or a colleague is symptomatic.

* 1. **You receive a referral (e.g. via NHS 111/ NHS 24) for a patient you believe may be at risk**

In this situation you should:

* Try to make contact with the patient over the phone. If you remain concerned ask them to contact NHS 111/ NHS 24 again for further advice and not to come to the pharmacy.
* Contact your Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office to alert them to the referral. This needs to be followed up at a national level.
	1. **A patient who you suspect is infected attends the pharmacy**

You should be displaying the NHS poster advising people not to enter the pharmacy if they may be affected. This is available from Internal advice

If you suspect that a patient is infected and is in the pharmacy you should:

* Keep calm and do not cause any unnecessary alarm.
* Ask the patient to return home and call 111. They should use a tissue to cover their face and mouth if they do not have a mask.
* If they are unable to go home, isolate the patient in the consultation room. DO NOT examine the patient. Place a notice on the door stating “do not enter”.
* Close the pharmacy [area – dependent upon business] and ask other customers/ patients to leave [the area]. All staff should remain in the pharmacy.
* Turn the air conditioning off (if available).
* Immediately contact the Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office for further advice.
* Patient confidentiality must be maintained
	1. **You are notified that a customer/ patient who has visited the pharmacy has been confirmed as infected:**
* Obtain as many details as possible from the person notifying you
* Close the pharmacy
* Contact the Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office for further advice.
	1. **Your local GP practice closes due to Covid-19**

**If you are attached to the GP practice:**

* Close the pharmacy.
* Try to find out why the practice has closed.
* Contact the Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office making sure you have the contact details of the person in charge of the practice (e.g. practice manager) or other person in charge. The office will give you further advice.

**If you are not attached to the GP practice**

* Try to find out why the practice has closed.
* Contact the Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office to inform them of the closure.
* If patients come to the pharmacy in need of a prescription and their prescription is not available (in England including on the spine) ask them to:

**England** - contact NHS111 for an urgent medicines referral

**Scotland** – make a supply, if possible, using CPUS

**Wales** – make an EMS supply if the LHB is allowing this to occur as an exceptional circumstance.

**Northern Ireland** – Use the normal emergency supply provisions to make a supply at the request of the patient

* 1. **Your local GP practice becomes a ‘hot hub’**

If you are made aware that your local GP practice is to become a ‘hot hub’ (will see actual/possible COVID-infected patients for the treatment of other conditions) please contact the Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office for further advice and guidance.

* 1. **You are contacted for comment by the press/ the press are outside the pharmacy**

All press enquiries should be handled by Head Office. Contact the Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office for further advice.

DO NOT make any comments to the press/ media

1. **Availability of medicines**
	1. **Stock shortages**

A large number of medicines are either wholly or partially manufactured in China. You will also be aware that India has placed some export restrictions on ingredients and finished products of some molecules. The Government is working with manufacturers, wholesalers and pharmacies

and is tracking whether supply issues are occurring. Please do not over-order medicines, particularly palliative care drugs, as this could exacerbate supply chain difficulties.

* 1. **Period of Treatment**

The Governments in England and Wales have written to GPs instructing them **NOT** to change the Period of Treatment for patients (e.g. from 28 to 56 days). If your local practice(s) do start to do this or talk about doing this you **MUST** inform the Superintendent Pharmacist’s Office. In addition, in England GPs are being encouraged to transfer patients to eRD in order to have a supply of prescriptions on the spine.

* 1. **Serious Shortage Protocol (SSP)**

On 12th March the Governments in England and Wales published an SSP for Fluoxetine (SSP05) which allows substitution of the 10mg tablets with 10mg capsules. Please see the PSNC/CPW websites for more details

**d. Patient on Monitored Dosage Systems in Scotland**

On the 16th March the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Scotland had advised that it may be helpful for some patients and Pharmacies to issue four week supplies of MDS for patients are usually weekly. We encourage you discuss with your local GP practices to see if this would be clinically appropriate for any of your patients.

**The advice to both patients and pharmacy teams is NOT to stockpile medicines**

1. **Other Issues**
	1. **Business continuity plans (BCP)**

We have a business continuity planwhich is constantly updated during these situations as more information becomes available. We do not routinely share the BCP with external agencies. Requests to see the BCP should be referred to: INTERNAL

* 1. **LPC and other agency publicity materials** If you receive an offer of publicity materials from an LPC or another local body or agency please refer the request to INTERNAL
	2. **Visits by external contractors/ bodies** – During this time we have advised NO external visits are appropriate. This includes NHS England inspections, GPhC inspectors and pharmaceutical company representatives. If an external visitor comes to your pharmacy please ask them to leave immediately. If they wish to talk to someone please ask them to contact INTERNAL If you receive phone calls from these agencies about any of our arrangements please refer them to contact the INTERNAL
	3. **Opening hours** – advice has been given to contractors allowing late opening, early closures and lunch closures where needed. Please refer to INTERNAL GUIDANCE before adopting any of these measures.
	4. Testing – information about the process for testing of pharmacy key workers who are symptomatic and are isolating has become available recently and is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested). Further details are available from INTERNAL HR.
		+ In England visit the Government’s self-service webpage [here](https://self-referral.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/)
		+ In Wales testing details have been shared with pharmacies and field teams by email. Please check these for information
		+ In Scotland please see the information on the [CPS website](https://www.cps.scot/cptesting)

The company can also arrange testing for you by contacting INTERNAL HR

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Start Date** | **Action** | **Who** | **Due Date** | **Complete** |
|  | * Ensure all colleagues are aware of the contents of this advice.
* Ensure all colleagues are aware of and are following the “Catch it. Bin it. Kill it.” advice issued and ensure the posters are on display
* Display the NHS door poster advising possibly affected patients not to enter the pharmacy
* Display the relevant NHS door posters advising possibly affected patients not to enter the pharmacy. Available INTERNAL
* Ensure that the most up to date “Managing Coronavirus Flowchart” is on display in a colleague facing area for all colleagues and professionals to see <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873496/COVID-19_flow_chart.pdf>
* Enforce hand washing procedures before and after patient contact
* Use general purpose sanitiser/ alcohol surface wipes to regularly wipe down surfaces that have had patient contact throughout the day
* Consider the use of gloves when interacting with patients in the consultation room. This does not remove the requirement for proper handwashing
* The Covid-19 lead should regularly check internal messages and current official advice on the PHE website.
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