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Free COVID-19 PPE Scheme Extended

The provision of free COVID-19 PPE to health and social care providers (General Practice, dentists, community pharmacy and opticians) is extended until the end of March 2022 to cope with the requirements throughout the financial year.

Healthwatch – Review of Access to GPs

In response to feedback from over 200,000 people, Healthwatch England has called for a national review of GP access arrangements following the COVID-19 pandemic. We know that the way in which patients could access services needed to reflect the rapid transfer of the virus, but Healthwatch found that many people have struggled to access care and treatment from their GP surgery and faced health inequalities.

The main themes and areas of concern from their [report](#) were:

- Communication
 - Patients felt that not enough information had been provided about the changes to services because of COVID-19 such as PPE or social distancing
 - Homeless people were also inappropriately asked for ID and proof of address when trying to register as a patient

- Booking an appointment
 - Patients experienced long waits when telephoning Practices and, when they did get through, they had problems trying to access the triage system in place and were also unsure whether someone would call them back
- Suitable appointments
 - Some patients have found the technical aspects of remote GP appointments challenging, particularly booking a flu vaccination online if they find it difficult to use new technology
 - Some also had concerns that a telephone appointment could miss a diagnosis that may have been picked up during a face-to-face consultation
- Access to regular treatment and medication
 - Patients struggled to obtain appointments for regular health check-ups, treatments and medication reviews to manage their condition and some reported worrying symptoms

Overall, by December 2020, around 75% of people who contacted Healthwatch were reporting negative experience of accessing GP services which is up 20% on the same point in 2019.

With the annual National GP Survey results due to be published in the summer, our Patient Access Checklist will enable you to review and evidence how you provide good patient access, if you are questioned by Healthwatch or the CQC.

Extension of Temporary Changes to the GP Contract

There are a few temporary changes to the GP contract which have been extended until **30 June 2021** due to the pandemic:

- Friends and Family Test (FFT) return suspension
- NHS 111 direct booking to continue at 1 slot per 500 patients per day
- The need for patients to sign prescriptions suspension

Also, the Data Security and Protection (DSP) Toolkit deadline for 2020-21 has been extended to 30 June 2021. We have updated the QCS suite of Data Protection policies and will be publishing a DSP Toolkit guide to help you complete the return.

Vaccine Update

The latest [Vaccine Update](#) is available and includes information about:

- The COVID-19 vaccination programme rollout
- Changes to the dTaP/IPV vaccine for both the pre-school booster and maternal pertussis dTaP/IPV programmes
- An update to the Bexsero Patient Information Leaflet
- MMR vaccine ordering

The EU Falsified Medicines Directive (FMD) and Delegated Regulation

When the UK's EU exit transition period ended on 31 December 2020, the 'safety features' Delegated Regulation (2016/161) under the EU Falsified Medicines Directive (FMD; 2011/62/EU) no longer applied in the UK.

As a reminder, this means that end users (Practices and Pharmacies) of the majority of prescription only medicines in the UK, including the FMD-compliant products supplied by PHE via ImmForm, don't need to verify or decommission the unique identifiers on serialised packs. However, they can still be dispensed for as long as they are still in date.

NICE Guidance

- [NICE guideline \[NG12\]](#) – [Suspected cancer: recognition and referral](#)
 - There has been a huge drop in cancer referrals and new diagnosis during the pandemic, so it's vital to use the pathways to make sure people with symptoms who ought to be investigated are not missed to increase the number of people who could make a full recovery with early diagnosis
 - This guidance covers identifying children, young people and adults with symptoms that could be caused by cancer
- [NICE guideline \[NG191\]](#) – [COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing COVID-19](#)
 - This guidance has been updated and replaces many other NICE guidance and brings together existing recommendations on managing COVID-19 so they can be found and used more easily
 - Recommendations were added for using corticosteroids, tocilizumab and sarilumab to treat COVID-19 (including the evidence and rationale for making the recommendations)

- [NICE guideline \[NG193\] – Chronic pain \(primary and secondary\) in over 16s](#)
 - Chronic primary pain is pain with no clear underlying cause, or pain (or its impact) that is out of proportion to any observable injury or disease
 - This guidance covers assessing all chronic pain (chronic primary pain, chronic secondary pain, or both) and managing chronic primary pain in people aged 16 years and over

NHS Service Finder

[NHS Service Finder](#) is a free online search tool that helps staff to signpost patients quickly to local pathways and understand which healthcare services are available in the local area. This short [video](#) explains what NHS Service Finder is and its benefits.