

Local health services extremely busy

Local NHS services are under extreme pressure as they are looking after rising numbers of very unwell people.

New NHS data covering the Christmas and New Year period shows flu cases have continued to skyrocket with the numbers of people hospitalised with flu quadrupling in a month and hundreds of people in critical care.

The NHS is also seeing rising cases of COVID, winter vomiting bugs and respiratory (breathing) illnesses.

To help prevent avoidable illness, protect vulnerable relatives and friends and ensure that vital NHS services are there for those who need them, local NHS leaders are calling on everyone in our area to follow this advice:

- Make sure that you and your family are up to date with flu, COVID, and RSV vaccinations. These vaccines are especially important for older people, those with underlying health conditions, and pregnant women. Visit the [Hertfordshire and west Essex vaccination hub](#) for more information on who is eligible and how to get your vaccine.
- If you or your family get the norovirus bug that causes sickness and diarrhoea, treat this at home with plenty of rest and drinking lots of fluids. Reduce the spread by washing your hands frequently with soap and water – hand gels won't kill norovirus. Stay at home and especially stay away from care homes, hospitals and social occasions until you've been clear of symptoms for at least two days. You will still be very infectious until then.
- If you or a loved one are very unwell, get medical advice straight away. Early help can prevent hospital admissions and save lives. If you need help for a minor concern, see if your local pharmacy is open as they can often help when GP practices are closed. [Contact NHS 111](#) free for urgent help or if you're unsure. Don't forget the mental health support on offer via NHS 111 – choose option 2 when you get through.

You can help your General Practice by using online consultations where possible and avoiding calling at the 8am rush. Visit your practice website for information on how to access their services if you need help with an ongoing health concern.

For minor illness or concerns there is a service that allows you to walk into a pharmacy and see a pharmacist who can offer appropriate advice,

treatment and support for the following range of minor illnesses and health concerns:

- **Earache** (aged 1 to 17 years)
- **Impetigo** (aged 1 year and over)
- **Infected** insect bites (aged 1 year and over)
- **Sore throats** (aged 5 years and over)
- **Shingles** (aged 18 years and over)
- **Sinusitis** (aged 12 years and over)
- **Urinary tract infections** (UTIs) in women (aged 16 to 64 years)

Where the pharmacist is unable to help or any symptoms warrant further investigation, the pharmacist can direct the individual to their GP surgery or another health care professional as appropriate. Find a pharmacy open near you on the [NHS website](#).

For more information on keeping well this winter visit the [Hertfordshire and west Essex winter health and wellbeing information hub](#). Thank you for playing your part in helping the NHS.