

Six steps for using GP services this autumn

The NHS in Liverpool is outlining practical advice for getting GP care in the city, as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact on services.

GPs are currently working through their busiest period ever, with many practices already experiencing levels of demand which the NHS would typically expect to only see during the busiest winter months.

Although most Covid-19 restrictions ended in July, many infection control measures such as social distancing, regular cleaning, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) remain in place for healthcare settings – including GP practices – to help keep vulnerable patients and the staff caring for them safe from the risk of Covid-19.

Because of this, practices are still unable to provide as many face-to-face appointments as they normally would, and are triaging patients over the phone to assess how best to provide care for each patient.

In some cases, patients will be offered an online, video or telephone consultation, which can be a convenient and flexible way to receive healthcare advice on a wide range of minor issues. However, if a patient needs to be seen by a member of the healthcare team face-to-face, this will still be arranged – as has been the case all the way through the pandemic.

NHS Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has set out six things local people should do to get the help they need, and keep services running as smoothly as possible, during autumn and winter:

- 1. Don't put off getting help** – GPs have been open and caring for patients throughout the pandemic, and you WILL be offered a face-to-face appointment if you have a clinical need for one. Don't delay contacting your GP practice if you have a concern about your health.
- 2. Get the Covid-19 vaccine** – Liverpool's Covid-19 infection rates are still high, and vaccination rates in the city are around 20% below the national average – far lower in some areas. Health services won't be able to return to normal while the virus is still creating high demand for Covid-related care and making it harder to deliver other types of care, especially to the most vulnerable patients.
- 3. Understand that demand is high, which might mean a delay getting through to your practice** – At times you might have to wait longer than normal on the phone, and/or for an appointment. Please be patient with staff – they will get to you, and are doing their very best to help you.
- 4. Help GP practice staff direct you to the right care** – Be prepared to briefly tell the receptionist at your practice about your condition over the phone. It's completely confidential, and they are trained to direct you to the best member of the healthcare team to meet your needs. This may not always be a GP – it could also be an advanced nurse practitioner, practice nurse, pharmacist, physiotherapist or social prescriber too. Directing you to the right person saves you time, and ensures that GPs are able to focus on those who must see a doctor.

5. **Use online consultation if you can** – All practice websites in Liverpool give people the option to fill out a simple online form (using a system called eConsult) to get advice and treatment for non-urgent problems. If you can use this, then it frees up phone lines for people who don't have online access, or who have a more urgent concern.
6. **Get your free NHS flu jab if you are eligible** – With health services already under pressure, it's also really important that patients do all they can to keep themselves well this winter. One of the best ways you can do this is by having the flu jab when you are invited to by your practice.

For urgent help or advice when the practice is closed, people should contact NHS 111. This service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 111.nhs.uk or by dialling 111.