



COVID-19 GP answer machine messages survey

Healthwatch Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (HWNN) gather experiences from health and social care service users to inform providers and commissioners how to improve their services.

Aim: The aim of this survey was to find out what information was shared on GP answer machine messages across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why this work was undertaken: Anecdotal evidence suggested that some patients were unsure as to whether GP care was still available. We also heard that GP answer machine messages were unclear and the GP offer across our patch was inconsistent.

Method: On Monday 6th April we phoned 59 GP surgeries across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, including Bassetlaw, to listen to their answer machine messages. This represents at least 1/3 of all surgeries in each PCN. We did not speak to practice staff.

4 practices had no answerphone message, so were excluded from the results below.

Findings:

- Only 4 out of 55 GP (7.3%) surgeries stated they were open. 51 did not specify whether they were open or closed within their answer machine message.
- Only 4 out of 55 GP (7.3%) surgeries stated their opening times.
- 27.3% (n=15) of surgeries did not provide clear COVID-19 information on all of the following: symptoms, isolation and NHS 111 online. One surgery did not mention the word Coronavirus once and some had out of date travel information on their message.

Many practices had a consistent message which read:

As per the new government guidelines on COVID 19 anyone with a continuous cough or fever of 37.8 centigrade or higher must self-isolate for 7 days. This includes children. If you or anyone in your household has these symptoms, all household members must self-isolate for 14 days. Travel history is now irrelevant. Anyone with these symptoms who is unwell are to stay at home and do not need to ring 111 or be tested. Anyone with these symptoms and are unwell should go to 111 online for advice. You must not come to the surgery. Further details can be found at [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus). Thank you for your continued support. Please hold the line while your call is transferred to the operator

Conclusions

- For many practices it was unclear from the answer machine messages, as to whether they were open or not.
- Not all practices provided clear information on COVID-19 symptoms, isolation or NHS 111 online.
- Advice for further help was aimed at those with internet access.

Recommendation

All surgeries use a standard message which states:

- Whether they are open or closed
- Opening times
- What types of appointment are available i.e. face to face, telephone or video call
- What the COVID-19 symptoms are and actions to take i.e. NHS 111 online
- What action to take for those who don't have access to NHS 111 online