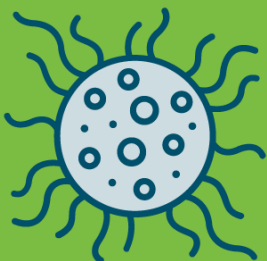




What are people telling us about COVID-19?

Key messages from our evidence – 17 April 2020



About

Healthwatch England has been gathering insight from the Healthwatch network about information and advice requested and views expressed by members of the public regarding COVID-19. The following insight is informed by data from **103** local Healthwatch – via responses to two surveys, as well as our usual processes for gathering intelligence from the network.

This regular internal briefing aims to provide an update for national health and social care stakeholders about the COVID-19 related:

- information and advice the public are asking us about,
- experiences people have shared about care with us.

Information people need

Local Healthwatch continue to regularly signpost people to the relevant local services for help with getting food and medications.

Access to services

We continue to hear many concerns about pharmacy services – people are experiencing delays in getting hold of their medications and are struggling to get through to pharmacies on the phone. Some people who are shielding are facing difficulties when the medications that are delivered to them at home are incorrect, or they are missing items.

People are also highlighting a lack of consistency between different GP practices – with regard to accessing face-to-face appointments where needed, accessing repeat prescriptions and links/processes with local pharmacies.

People continue to raise concerns and queries about the services they would usually access, and what to do or expect in the current circumstances. These services include:

- Dentistry – particularly for those with an acute problem needing emergency treatment.
- Community nursing services for wound care.
- Regular treatment and monitoring that is usually provided in community/primary care settings. This includes long-acting injections (such as vitamin B12, antipsychotic drugs and hormonal treatments), and blood monitoring – e.g. the frequent INR tests required by people who take warfarin (blood-thinning medication).

In particular, we have heard that pregnant people are experiencing anxiety about attending hospital appointments and birthing units – in one area, this has resulted in a noted rise in people feeling forced into having an unassisted birth.

Shielding

We continue to hear about confusion over shielding letters – including for people who have received a shielding letter when they were not expecting to, and others who believe they should be shielding but have not received a letter.

Some people who believe they should be shielding but have not received a letter are facing difficulties proving their circumstances to their employers, requiring signposting to their GP practice to get this proof.

People who are shielding continue to raise the issue of accessing hospital treatment or appointments that are going ahead, when the transport available to them cannot guarantee sufficient distancing from other people (including patient transport).

Information

Local Healthwatch continue to highlight the need for timely accessible information and reasonable adjustments to meet people's communication needs. This includes information for those not online, Easy Read format and BSL, as well as other languages.

Access to social care

We continue to receive concerns about social care support – surrounding the provision of PPE for care support workers and family carers, and how people can get the support they need when their carer(s) is unable to work.

Local Healthwatch have also highlighted the impact of changes to social care provision on family carers – for example, due to respite or day care services being closed.

Positive feedback

Finally, we have also received some positive feedback about people's experiences of accessing care at this time – particularly urgent and emergency care services. People have praised healthcare staff's professionalism and care, highlighting how reassuring this was, especially as many had been reluctant to access these services in the first place.

“I was advised by my GP to go straight to the Emergency dept with some cardiac symptoms. I didn't want to go as I felt I could be wasting their time during this busy period. I arrived, the waiting area was completely empty, although there was a steady stream of ambulances arriving outside. My wife was told to go home and wait there for me as part of their Coronavirus protocols. I didn't wait long before taken in to see a nurse, who was wearing PPE and I was given a face mask to wear for the duration of my visit. She did a blood pressure test, took blood and did an ECG. I waited a short space of time before I was taken for a chest x-ray by a Porter who was not wearing PPE and straight back to see a Junior Doctor who was wearing PPE. The Dr was thorough, listened to me, also did further testing and checked everything over with his Consultant to ensure he wasn't missing anything. I felt reassured by the use of PPE and the protocols which were in place to keep me away from other patients during my visit. I was sent home, also reassured that I had had a thorough examination and that I could go back if I needed to. Thank you NHS staff for making time for me at this busy time.”