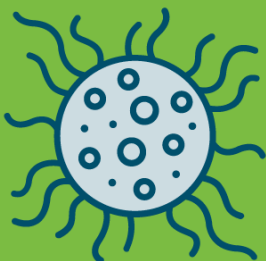


healthwatch

# What are people telling us about COVID-19?

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Key messages from our evidence - 03 June 2020



## About

This regular briefing aims to provide an update about the COVID-19 related:

- information and advice the public are seeking from Healthwatch,
- experiences people have shared about care.

The following insight is informed by data from 121 local Healthwatch services across England.

## Key messages by issue

### Mental health

- Local Healthwatch continue to hear about the impact of the pandemic on people's mental wellbeing. This is due to a variety of reasons, including loneliness and social isolation, employment and financial stress, and anxiety about both COVID-19 and other health conditions.
- We have also heard about the additional mental stress that autistic people and people with learning disabilities are experiencing - for example, when faced with situations such as admission to a hospital without being accompanied by their family carer (due to visiting restrictions), or the prospect of going back out into public areas.
- For some people with existing mental health conditions, the changes to services they would usually access are leaving them feeling abandoned.

**"I had an appointment for an assessment with a specialist psychotherapy service at the beginning of April that was cancelled. No other support was offered, I was just told that I could ring the crisis team and out of hours team. I don't feel able to do that as I don't know what the process would be, and I have auditory processing difficulties that make telephone contact very difficult. I have been left at crisis point with no named person to contact, no care coordinator, just medication and being under the care of my well-meaning GP who can't do anything else to help me." Healthwatch Sheffield**

### Digital and telephone care

- We continue to receive mixed feedback about digital and telephone care. Whilst many are having positive experiences of accessing services such as GP appointments online, we know that this kind of remote care does not work for everyone. In particular, we have heard concerns about autistic people, those living with dementia and people with learning disabilities being left behind.
- We have also heard that for people who need support from mental health services, care by telephone is not always meeting their needs. For many, talking to a stranger on the

phone is very difficult. Some people feel they need more regular support by phone, or face-to-face contact – particularly if they feel close to crisis point.

## Dental care

- Local Healthwatch continue to signpost people to emergency dental care in their area. People are not always aware of how to access this service, which can cause additional stress when they are experiencing acute dental pain or other concerning symptoms.
- We have also heard concerns about maternity exemption certificates and whether they will be extended. By the time non-urgent dental care is available locally, some people's exemption certificates will no longer be valid – meaning they will be unable to afford the dental treatment they need that they would have otherwise accessed during this time.
- We are aware that dental practices have been advised to reopen for face to face care from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June, provided they have the necessary infection prevention and control measures and PPE available. We will continue to monitor our feedback on this issue.

## Test and trace

- Concerns have been raised about the accessibility of home testing kits, for example for people who need large print to read the instructions provided. Similarly, people with limited dexterity may not be able to self-swab if they do not have anyone available at home to help them.

## Access to routine services

- Local Healthwatch continue to receive queries from people about how they can travel safely to appointments that are going ahead. We have received feedback from some areas where local transport services are working well, but for others, this remains an issue.
- People have expressed frustration about a lack of clear and consistent communication about what they can expect from the services they would usually access. This is making them feel stressed and ignored as they do not know if their appointments will go ahead, and if not, what will happen next.
- In particular, we have heard about the challenges people are facing without community podiatry services. For some, the lack of this service is having a knock-on effect on their mobility and increasing their risk of infection.

**“I usually attend a local health centre for chiropody. I was informed by telephone that this service is not operating under lockdown. I’m now struggling to stand up - what other help is available? My husband has back issues and cannot easily assist me with standing.”** Healthwatch Trafford

## Care homes

- The feedback we have received about care homes shows very mixed experiences across the country. We continue to hear concerns about access to PPE and testing in these settings.
- Our insight also highlights that when family and friends cannot visit their loved ones in care homes, timely and regular communication about their wellbeing from care home staff can really make a difference:

“My mum is currently living in a care home. She has been there since the start of the year after a fall at home. She was supposed to go back home with home carers before lockdown, but this was postponed... I am very upset with the care home. I found out my mum had COVID-19 four days after she began to deteriorate. I received a call from the care home telling me and any other close family members to video call my mum as it wasn't looking very hopeful that she would survive the virus. This was the first I knew that my mum had symptoms. I am very unhappy with this care.” Healthwatch York

“Our son has a severe learning disability and lives in a residential home. Before lockdown, he had a home visit every Saturday. Naturally, we were very upset that we could no longer see our son and he missed his visits home. However, the staff there have been exceptional in helping us to keep in touch with our son and providing his care under lockdown.

"Here are some of the things that have helped us to stay in touch: Our phone calls and enquiries about our son have always been answered promptly and with courtesy. We have been able to have brief telephone conversations with our son when he wished to say a few words. Recently we have been able to video call him... A daily diary is kept by the staff of our son's activities and excerpts of this have been scanned and emailed to us. We usually have regular care meetings with the staff to discuss our son's medication, epilepsy and wellbeing and these are minuted. We had a virtual meeting by phone and email, and minutes were recorded.

"A medical emergency was dealt with involving a paramedic and prompt actions were taken by our son's doctor, the epilepsy nurse and staff at the residential home to prevent another emergency. We are indebted to the staff, our son's key workers, and the manager. They have been outstanding in caring for our son at this difficult time.”

Healthwatch Sunderland

## Talk to us

If you have a question about the contents of this update, please either [\*contact a member of the Policy or Intelligence teams\*](#) or email [CV19Enquiries@Healthwatch.co.uk](mailto:CV19Enquiries@Healthwatch.co.uk)