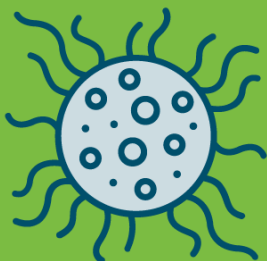


healthwatch

What are people telling us about COVID-19?

Key messages from our evidence - 26 June 2020



About

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 seeking from Healthwatch,
- Experiences people have shared about care.

The following insight is informed by data from 130 local Healthwatch services across England.

Key messages by issue

Testing for COVID-19

- Local Healthwatch have received mixed feedback about testing for COVID-19. While some people have found visiting a testing centre easy and efficient, we have also heard that the online booking process can be difficult for people to use.
- We have also heard concerns about the accessibility of testing centres for people with hearing impairments, as well as care home residents, staff and their family members. This continues the broad theme across all the feedback we have received that the COVID-19 response has not effectively considered accessible communication needs.

“I was offered COVID-19 testing due to my symptoms. I booked the test online, it was not very straightforward and could be confusing for those not familiar with online booking... I was offered numerous slots for that same day, so I booked one. When I arrived, there was no one else there. I was directed around to two different check-in areas, then to testing. The test was taken with the window down. It was very quick and efficient; the whole thing was done in 10 minutes. I was surprised at the high number of staff and how empty it was. I received my results by text within 24 hours. With this much capacity, I think many more people could be tested.” Healthwatch Warwickshire

Digital and telephone care

- We continue to receive mixed feedback about digital and telephone care. This shows us that while these remote solutions work well for many people, they do not meet everyone’s communication and care needs.
- For example, we have heard that some older people with learning disabilities find video calls in their homes scary and intrusive. Many need some help to get online and the people supporting them are not always able to provide this.
- We are doing further work to investigate people’s experiences of remote consultations and expect to share the results in July.

Dental care

- We continue to hear about the difficulties people are having in accessing the dental care they need. Information from dental practices is inconsistent, meaning people are uncertain about whether services are running again and what treatment is available to them. This issue is likely being compounded by confusing messages at a national level about dentists re-opening when in reality services are very much constrained. We have also heard about some cases of dentists applying additional charges to patients to cover Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) costs, making dental care even less accessible.

Vitamin B12 treatment

- We have heard feedback from over 30 local Healthwatch across the country about access to vitamin B12 injections.
- In a small number of these 30 areas people are receiving their B12 injections, either as normal or at a different GP practice. However, in many areas, there has been an inconsistent approach to delivering this treatment, with some GP practices administering the injections but others not. Some people are also reporting inconsistencies within the same GP practice.
- As an alternative, some people's treatment has been changed from B12 injections to tablets. However, people with B12 deficiency due to pernicious anaemia are not able to absorb vitamin B12 in tablet form. As a result, people have expressed concerns about the level of knowledge their healthcare professionals have about their condition.
- Some people who have been advised to now take tablets were told to use over-the-counter alternatives. In some cases, people were advised to buy tablets online. Buying medication online can have considerable risks and we are concerned that these risks may not have been highlighted when the advice was given.
- We heard of one case where the patient was told that the reason for stopping injections was "an instruction from the government" although this was not the case. In another case, we heard about an NHS Clinical Commissioning Group referring to out-of-date guidance from the British Society for Haematology. Services need to be able to provide accurate information if they are to maintain credibility.
- People are anxious about not receiving this treatment and for many, it is resulting in worrying symptoms - including extreme tiredness, confusion, low mood and hair loss. Some feel that their symptoms are not being taken seriously enough by their healthcare professionals.

“My daughter has pernicious anaemia and needs a vitamin B12 injection every 2 months. She is well overdue for an injection and is beginning to feel more and more unwell. She has been told that no B12 injections are being given at present and there is no date given for them being resumed. She was also told to take tablets, but as she is unable to absorb B12 in tablet form, this was not a helpful response. With a possible return to work in June, she is understandably worried about how she will cope as her untreated symptoms grow progressively worse.” Healthwatch Isle of Wight

Impact on family carers

- Local Healthwatch continue to highlight the challenges faced by family carers at this time. The closure of respite services has left many feeling stressed, isolated and forgotten about.
- People who care for someone living with dementia have told us that the lack of social contact and stimulation has caused a deterioration in their loved one’s health. We have also heard how difficult it can be to help some people with dementia to understand the lockdown measures.
- We have also heard that family carers have felt uninformed and unprepared when the person they care for has been discharged from a hospital stay, due to a lack of communication or clear information from the hospital.

“My father was discharged from a hospital stay after cardiac treatment and with probable Covid-19. My mother, who is 78, has been caring for him. She was advised to wear a mask and gloves but not provided with any or instructions about how best to use PPE so has been using household items... Once at home my father fell twice and had to be helped up by my mother, so isolating from each other was not possible. He has since been readmitted to the hospital.” Healthwatch Northamptonshire

- Over the next few months, Healthwatch will be undertaking a national project looking at hospital discharge at this time. This will explore how well the new rapid discharge guidance has worked for patients and their families/carers.

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