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Tel: 01202 309500

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Dear patient,

Over the last few months you are likely to have noticed a difference in the way things are being done in general practice as we manage coronavirus (Covid-19).

We want to start off by saying thank you.

Thank you for adapting so quickly to these new ways of working – it has been the drastic, yet fundamental, change needed to ensure the safety of you and our staff.

To slow down the spread of coronavirus, we have worked to reduce the number of people coming into the practice by using online consultation systems like e-Consult (on our website www.littledownsurgery.co.uk), telephone appointments and video consultations.

Our top priority is, and has always been, to keep you and our staff safe while ensuring you get the care you need.

This is why we ask you to continue what you have been doing to access your GP service.

Please do not visit the GP practice without an appointment.

Instead call the practice or go to our practice website. You can speak to a GP or nurse over the phone, email or have a video consultation. This will often mean to get to see the right person to help you, much quicker.

If a doctor or nurse does need to see you in person then you will be given an appointment to attend the practice.

Only coming in to the surgery with an appointment means:

- you will get seen promptly

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- you are reducing your risk of catching/spreading coronavirus by avoiding a waiting room
- you are helping to keep staff healthy and safe
- The practice is able to maintain a clean environment and protect you from the virus

While we realise this could be inconvenient, we think it is important to keep people safe, reduce the spread of coronavirus and get the maximum benefit from the healthcare resources which will be available.

A home visiting service will be provided as usual for patients who are unable to leave their home.

Enclosed with this letter is a frequently asked questions document, which may help answer questions you have.

If you have any comments, questions or concerns, then please do get in touch with us to let us know how we can support you.

Thank you once again for your support and understanding as we all adapt to a new way of working.

Kind regards,

Emma Prince
Practice Manager

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FAQ document GP appointments and bookings

The way we access GP services has changed. Below are some frequently asked questions that may help you understand these changes:

Why can't I walk into my GP practice?

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has forced us all to work differently to help slow down the spread of the virus. All healthcare settings are taking special measures to protect you, the public and their staff. GP practices are working as hard as ever, but differently.

Where possible we want to avoid people having to wait inside a waiting room together, as we know this increases the risk of the virus spreading. So therefore, we have locked the reception front door, the door will be unlocked for those patients who have been invited to attend the practice from a GP or nurse only. We will allow a maximum of 3 people in our waiting room at one time. Like hospitals and dentists, we have also had to change how we offer our services to you.

If you do need to come in, then we can ensure there are a minimal number of people in the practice, we can maintain social distancing and keep patients and staff safe.

How do I get a GP appointment?

The easiest and most effective method is to use e-Consult through the practice website, or you can telephone. You will then be contacted by a clinician to talk through your symptoms either over the phone, via email, or if needed and you have the available technology, through a video consultation.

Why can't I book a face-to-face GP appointment?

We have adapted the way in which you can get an appointment quickly and safely.

Most patient's health concerns can be managed over the phone or via video consultation. This is why we are providing you with either an initial phone call or video consultation to decide what would be the best way to help. If we can support you without needing you to come into the practice then we reduce the need for you to travel, and reduce the risk of the virus spreading.

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If you do need a face-to-face appointment, you will be invited to attend the practice.

If we can ensure there are a minimal number of people in the practice, we can maintain social distancing and keep patients and staff safe.

What is e-Consult?

You can access e-Consult via the practice website. It lets patients consult with their own NHS GP online by completing a quick form which is reviewed by the practice. After reviewing your query, you will then be directed toward the most appropriate help. This might be some advice on self-help, pharmacy advice, an appointment with one of the practice clinical team or another service. Your data is secure at all times – including during a video consultation or telephone call.

What if I do not have access to a smartphone or web camera?

While technology has evolved and supports us all in many different ways in our day-to-day lives, we appreciate not everyone will have access to a smartphone or web camera for a video consultation. We can still talk to you on your mobile phone or landline.

What about Nurse appointments?

We are not able to provide some services due to the risk from COVID-19, this includes ear syringing, minor surgery and spirometry breathing tests. We are monitoring the national guidance on this closely and will keep the list of procedures we can perform under review.

Many services are continuing as normal and it is very important that patients continue to come in as normal for immunisations, smears and blood test in order to keep them safe and healthy in the long term. We are putting measures in place as described in this letter to keep everyone as safe as possible.

We are still doing Chronic Disease Reviews for patients with heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes or respiratory disease but these are being done slightly differently. If a blood test is required this will be done by our Healthcare Assistant who will also do any other monitoring required (weight, height, blood pressure etc). When all the test results are back the Practice Nurse will contact the patient by telephone to discuss future management of their long term conditions. Other reviews may be done entirely over the telephone in order to reduce the COVID risks.

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Will I need to wear a face mask if I come into my practice for an appointment?

To help limit the spread of the virus, we are asking for all patients aged 12 and over to wear a face covering when they come to the practice. This doesn't have to be a face mask, but a cloth covering which covers your mouth and nose while allowing you to breathe comfortably. It can be as simple as a scarf or bandana that ties behind the head. You can find additional information by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>

How do I get a repeat prescription?

The easiest way is to use our online service which enables you to quickly and efficiently re-order repeat medication. We also now send all prescriptions electronically to your nominated chemist to save you having to come into the practice to collect the paper prescription. Please contact Reception on 01202 309500 for queries about either of these services.

How do I cancel or move a booked appointment?

If you need to cancel or re-arrange an appointment, please contact Reception.

How do I see a GP during the evening and weekends?

For evening and weekend access to GPs please either visit 111.nhs.uk or call NHS 111.

What if I am not registered with a GP practice?

You can call any GP surgery to get emergency treatment for up to 14 days if you are not registered with a GP or are away from home, provided you are temporarily resident in that practice's catchment area.

If you are a resident in the area and need to register with a practice, then it's best to look at practices where your home falls within its geographical boundaries. You can check a GP practice boundary by visiting their website.

Once you have selected which practice you would like to register with, make contact with them either by calling or visiting their website.

You will be asked to fill out a registration form and once it is completed and returned, NHS England will transfer your medical records to your new practice. They will also write to you to confirm your registration with your chosen practice.

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What do I do if I think I have coronavirus (Covid-19)?

The main symptoms of coronavirus are:

- high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back
- new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

If you are experiencing one or more of these symptoms then **DO NOT** visit your GP practice. You should visit 111.nhs.uk/covid-19 or call NHS 111 if you cannot get help online.

You must self-isolate for seven days from when your symptoms started. Anyone you live with, or in your support bubble, who does not have symptoms must self-isolate for 14 days from when the first person started having symptoms.

You must also ask for a test as soon as you start showing symptoms. You can do this online – visit www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test