

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS – RCGP GUIDANCE FOR GENERAL PRACTICE (INCLUDING OOH)

13 March 2020 Version 1

The UK has now moved from the containment to the delay phase of response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and new guidance has been issued (links below). The RCGP, BMA and RCN are interpreting this in the context of general practice, including the out of hours setting.

New guidance can be found in the links below. Members from Scotland might also wish to refer to specific guidance from Health Protection Scotland, and we advise members in Wales and Northern Ireland to refer to that issued by Public Health England.

Health Protection Scotland guidance on COVID-19 for Primary Care:

https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2930/documents/1_covid-19-guidance-for-primary-care.pdf

Public Health England guidance on COVID-19:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

Latest information on COVID-19 from Public Health Wales:

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Public Health Agency Northern Ireland information on COVID-19:

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

Case definition

This has now changed, as from 13th March. People who have a new continuous cough and/or a temperature of 37.8 degrees or higher should self-isolate for seven days. As stated in the guidance ***‘Travel and contact history are no longer important for diagnosis, which is on the basis of symptoms alone. If people who have travelled do not have symptoms they do not need to stay at home, regardless of their travel history.’***

Detailed information on case definition can be found here (this is the same for all nations):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-initial-investigation-of-possible-cases/investigation-and-initial-clinical-management-of-possible-cases-of-wuhan-novel-coronavirus-wn-cov-infection#criteria>

Symptomatic patients

Patients with symptoms that they can manage at home are not required to contact any service, but they should self-isolate for seven days according to government guidance. Those who become unwell, with shortness of breath or other symptoms, or who are not better after seven days should contact NHS111 online (or equivalent service in devolved administrations). 999 is for medical emergencies. Patients with relevant symptoms (new persistent cough, or temperature of 37.8 degrees or higher), according to current guidance, who contact practices or out of hours services by telephone should be directed to online information

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

Those who have no internet access should be given this information verbally.

Testing

Symptomatic patients who are self-isolated at home will not require testing. There is currently no requirement for GP services to organise or carry out tests.

Telephone triage and online consulting

During the coronavirus emergency, it is envisaged that the majority of general practices and out of hours services will operate telephone triage and conduct telephone or video consultations where possible. Professional guidance from the College is in development.

Symptomatic patients in surgeries (and out of hours services)

Despite triage, it is possible that some patients who are given appointments for face to face consultations will have respiratory symptoms (new continuous cough and/or fever) upon arrival at the GP surgery or out of hours service. At the point at which symptoms are identified (at reception or during consultation), these patients should be directed to return home and follow the 'stay at home guidance' referred to above. If patients are too unwell to return home and require hospital admission, this should be arranged through the ambulance service and the ambulance call handler informed that the patient is a potential case of Covid-19.

Patients with viral symptoms who do not meet case definition

There will be a cohort of patients who have possible viral symptoms (eg rhinorrhoea, myalgia, sore throat) who do not meet the case definition but who could conceivably have Covid-19. Some of these may be patients with other acute problems requiring assessment and some may be people who are quite ill, yet do not have either cough or fever. If patients are well enough to attend surgery (or out of hours centre), then the following principles should be applied whenever possible

- i. GP surgeries/out of hours centres should identify a location, preferably separate from other patient areas, in which the patient could be assessed. This should be suitable for clinical work. If possible, the patient should access this location via a different entrance. Time waiting in the surgery should be minimised to prevent the risk of cross infection to other patients.
- ii. Clinical staff should wear the currently advised personal protective equipment for a possible case of COVID-19. This includes apron, gloves and a fluid repellent mask.

(see guidance below) These should be disposed of as clinical waste, once used, after each patient contact.

Guidance on correct use of PPE

Health Protection England, putting on PPE:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/870028/COVID-19_PPE_Donning_poster.pdf

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKz_vNGsNhc&feature=youtu.be

Health Protection England, removing PPE

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/870163/PH E COVID-19 Doffing_poster.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/870163/PH_E_COVID-19_Doffing_poster.pdf)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUo5O1JmLH0&feature=youtu.be>

Health Protection Scotland guidance on putting on and removal of PPE (see appendix 3):

https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2930/documents/1_covid-19-guidance-for-primary-care.pdf

- iii. All clinical equipment should be kept within this 'dirty' area and should be cleaned after every use.
- iv. Meticulous hygiene both before patient contact and afterwards is essential. This will include hand washing in accordance with national guidance and wiping down of surfaces.

Symptomatic patients on home visits

Where GPs or other practice staff conduct home visits to assess patients with possible viral symptoms who do not meet the case definition for Covid-19, then PPE should be used - aprons, gloves and a fluid repellent mask. These should be double bagged and disposed of as clinical waste, once used. Should such patients require hospital admission, the ambulance call handler should be informed that they have viral symptoms, but do not meet the case definition.

Please ensure that you are reading the most up-to-date version of this guidance as Covid-19 is a fast-evolving situation.