

Your Health

Update for patients and the public in Berkshire West
(Includes West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading)



May 2021

GP surgeries during Covid

Covid has changed the look and feel of healthcare and as clinicians start to plan for the future, their focus is on using the new and different ways of working which were introduced in response to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

All sections of the NHS had to adapt swiftly as it adapted to cope with the demands of Covid and keep patients and staff safe. GPs will continue with some of these new ways of working as we ease out of lockdown.

This includes triaging patients via telephone or online to help practices decide the most appropriate course of care. It has proved beneficial to many patients who appreciate the flexibility of virtual appointments if they work full time, are housebound or have caring responsibilities. It also helps keep footfall at the surgeries to a safe level, which is vital because Covid is still not eradicated and social distancing must be maintained.

Triage does not mean GPs will no longer conduct face-to-face appointments – if there is a medical need then that will still happen, but virtual consultations will be very thorough and give patients plenty of time to talk through their symptoms and concerns. It may be, after this conversation, it's felt the GP isn't the best person to provide help and a patient will be referred to one of the many other professionals now based at surgeries including Physician Associates, Social Prescribers and community pharmacists.

Look out for a special edition of this newsletter early next month, which will profile some of the key people now providing health and social care at our local surgeries and give more details of the way Primary Care is working to ensure patients continue to receive the best and most appropriate care in their community.

Audiology Engagement event – 20 May

People using local NHS adult hearing services are being urged to join a special engagement event to discuss plans aimed at improving the services in Berkshire West.

Health service commissioners are holding the virtual event on Thursday 20 May from 2.30-4pm to look at current services offered in local hospitals and high street outlets. This includes adult hearing (hearing tests and assessments) and the supply and fitting of NHS hearing aids, as well as a review of the information, advice, follow up appointments and after care offered to patients.



The event is being run by Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which currently commissions services for people aged 55 and over who suffer from age-related hearing loss. At the moment the services are supplied by the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and SpecSavers, however the nature of the current system means people can face unnecessary three yearly GP referrals and there are fragmented pathways for patients under 55.

The contracts are due to expire soon which is why the health teams believe now is a good time to discuss options for the future with those who use the service and other interested people.

The CCG's preferred options are for an inclusive Adult Hearing Loss service for all adults aged over 18, providing a more co-ordinated lifetime pathway with onward referrals between ENT, Adult Hearing services and diagnostics. This would mean people have more timely access to assessments. They would also benefit from easier access to a range of other treatments, support, after care and advice services. The proposed changes would shorten waiting times for appointments and treatment and create a service that is highly responsive to the needs of local communities.

Anyone interested in the event can [join the meeting here](#)

Or call in (audio only) [+44 20 3321 5208,27056294#](tel:+44203321520827056294)

Phone Conference ID: 270 562 94#

Alternatively, you can send your comments to bwccg.enquiries@nhs.net marking them for the attention of the Adult Hearing Loss team.

Covid vaccine in pregnancy

Local GP, Dr Aparna Balaji did [this short video](#), talking about having your Covid-19 vaccination during pregnancy. This follows the announcement from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on 17 April, advising that pregnant women should now be offered the Covid-19 vaccine at the same time of the rest of the population - based on their age and clinical risk group. Further details [can be found here](#).

Support for people struggling with suicidal thoughts

A host of support agencies in West Berkshire have produced a useful guide giving contact details and information about the places people can turn to if they are experiencing suicidal thoughts. The link [is here](#).

Dementia Friends

Dementia Friendly West Berkshire website is now live: www.dementiafriendlywestberkshire.co.uk (you can also type in www.dfwb.co.uk and it will redirect you to the same page). The site is optimised for mobile phones and tablets.



Long Covid

Dr Deepak Ravindran, Clinical Lead for Long Covid at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, [hosted a recent podcast](#) exploring the challenges the condition has presented to a couple of people who have been laid low with long covid and looking at patterns emerging from the cases being treated at the RBH Long Covid clinic.

Annual Health Checks for people with learning disabilities

Berkshire West CCG has worked with Talkback, West Berkshire Mencap, and Dr Heather Howells, their GP Clinical Lead for Mental Health and learning Disabilities, to produce this video: [Annual Health Checks during COVID and beyond](#).

The video shares information and advice to health professionals about how they should deliver health checks and amplifies the voice of people with learning disabilities about the value of them, in achieving better health and wellbeing outcomes. It offers sound insight into the principles of offering a gold standard health check.

The process was driven, shaped and informed, by the interests and aspirations of individuals with learning disabilities, who can regularly experience health inequalities. If you have any feedback please contact: cecilia.fashesin2@nhs.net

Raising awareness in May

There have been a number of important Awareness Days in May:

Diabetes Prevention Week: 10 - 16 May

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body either doesn't produce enough insulin, or the insulin it does produce doesn't work properly (insulin resistance). It can be a combination of both. You can help prevent Type 2 diabetes by eating a healthy, balanced diet, maintaining a healthy weight and keeping physically active

Some people are at a higher risk of Type 2 diabetes, this includes: men, people of South Asian or Black ethnicity, people who are overweight and people with a family history of Type 2 diabetes.

People living with diabetes face Type 2 diabetes can lead to serious health complications if left untreated. You can find out your risk of Type 2 diabetes by using the Diabetes UK [Know Your Risk Score here](#). If your score does come back as 'at risk', you can sign up to your free local Healthier You programme.



International Nurses Day

On 12 May, the Royal Berkshire Hospital NHS Foundation Trust celebrated International Nurses Day by producing a video highlighting the diversity of nursing within Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust – both in terms of background, but also specialisms. Watch the [video here](#).

Dying Matters Awareness Week

The same week also saw Dying Matters Awareness Week - which aims to encourage conversations around death, dying and bereavement. Colleagues from the Royal Berkshire Palliative Care Team answered questions from the public via social media, and produced [several videos](#), explaining how to talk about difficult subjects.

Safe Sex Berkshire

The long-awaited Step 3 of the COVID-19 roadmap kicks in on Monday 17 May, when many of the social restrictions will be lifted. It goes without saying that people are eager to return to socialising more freely. We're expecting to see a rise in people having unprotected sex and we'd like to encourage these Berkshire residents to think ahead about their sexual health and staying safe.



A new Safe Sex Berkshire campaign is designed to increase awareness around HIV testing, PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis) and PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis). We'd encourage people to visit the new pages on the [Safe Sex Berkshire website](#) and read about the importance of regular HIV and STI testing and how you can protect yourself. Find out [more here](#).

May Measurement Month

May Measurement Month is a global awareness campaign led by the International Society of Hypertension (ISH), which puts the spotlight on increasing access to blood pressure screening and ways of improving it. Top ten tips for a healthy blood pressure are shared below:

OUR TOP 10 TIPS FOR HEALTHY BLOOD PRESSURE

MAY MEASUREMENT MONTH
International Society of Hypertension

- Keep your weight healthy:** just doing this can help bring down high blood pressure
- Exercise regularly:** aim for an average of around 30 minutes a day. For the exercise to be worthwhile, you need to feel warmer, breathe harder, and your heart needs to beat faster than it normally does
- Eat plenty of fruit and/or vegetables** every day. Eat vegetables raw or lightly steamed, rather than boiled, to get maximum nutrition. Avoid frying
- Add beetroot to your diet:** regular consumption of beetroot juice has been found to help bring down your blood pressure
- Cut down on salt:** don't forget a lot of salt is hidden in processed foods and is very high in most breads, cereals, soups and sauces. If possible, always read the label
- Cut down on fat and sugar:** always check the label, and be especially wary of hydrogenated or 'trans' fats, as well as sugars 'hidden' as other names such as sucrose, dextrose, fructose, and glucose in e.g. fruit juices and fizzy drinks
- Stop smoking tobacco!** Your arteries clog up even faster if you smoke and this causes many other health problems. Your blood pressure actually rises while you smoke
- Reduce your caffeine intake** — and remember caffeine is found in some fizzy drinks as well as in coffee and tea
- Don't drink too much alcohol:** stick to local daily recommendations – usually less than 2 drinks for men and 1 for women (1 drink = small beer or wine)
- Relax:** stress contributes to raising blood pressure. So, avoid stress where possible and allow time for relaxation. This can take many forms such as quiet time, socialising, exercising or laughter

Thank you for taking part in May Measurement Month

For further information, visit www.maymeasure.com/public-info
If you have concerns about any of the above, please seek advice from a trained medical professional

A SIMPLE MEASURE TO SAVE LIVES
#checkyourpressure

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www.maymeasure.com

May Measurement Month is an initiative led by the International Society of Hypertension and endorsed by the World Hypertension League

New garden at the Berkshire Cancer Centre

A new garden offering peace and quiet to patients undergoing radiotherapy has opened at the Berkshire Cancer Centre. The League of Friends donated £1,500 and then volunteers and staff helped create the garden.

Janet Lippett, Chief Medical Officer for Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, joined the opening event this month. She said: “We are incredibly proud of how our team at the Berkshire Cancer Centre continuously improves the care and treatment of our cancer patients. Thanks to the generous donations of money and time, our volunteers and staff have created a tranquil space which will greatly help improve the wellbeing and experience of our patients when visiting the hospital.”

