



# COVID-19

## **Emergency Advice to Practices on the Coronavirus Pandemic**

**Target Audience: All constituent practices**

**Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic is causing widespread disruption across the country and a level of strain on the NHS which has never been seen before. GPs across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire are having to adapt their processes constantly, in real time as the situation develops. BBOLMCs has been maintaining constant communication with practices, CCGs, NHSE, the BMA and other LMCs across the country. We have produced the following guidance in line with those discussions.

### General Service Delivery:

The way we deliver day-to-day General Practice must be heavily altered during the pandemic. The priorities of such measures are to minimise patient footfall to the practice as much as possible to prevent spread amongst vulnerable patient groups, and to minimise risk to staff. Each practice will be different but as a starting point we recommend the following measures:

1. Suspension of all routine appointments for the foreseeable future with all resources instead focused on urgent care for those most in need
2. Absolutely no face to face appointment **unless first telephone triaged by a clinician** to determine if the appointment is absolutely necessary and how best to arrange the appointment to minimise risk to others
3. A move to remote ways of working including telephone appointments, virtual appointments, remote off site working for staff in self isolation

With regard to practices and GPs being at contractual or professional risk during this time, we draw your attention to the helpful letter signed by the Chief Medical Officers of all four nations, the GMC and NHS England which should reassure you in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

We would also draw practices' attention to the responsibilities placed upon patients during this time, with regard to the emergency powers of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020<sup>2</sup> which have been invoked by the Secretary of State, and that it is an offence to:

- Breach an instruction to self-isolate or quarantine which has been imposed by the Secretary of State or Public Health
- Obstruct without reasonable excuse any person carrying out their function under the regulations
- Provide false or misleading information intentionally or recklessly to a person carrying out a function under the regulations

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

The safety of staff **must be prioritised**. We cannot deliver any care for our patients if we are off sick or self-isolating with the virus ourselves.

The LMC has received widespread feedback that PPE provided centrally is not sufficient. Issues such as surgical masks with altered best before dates, plastic aprons rather than full-sleeved-gowns, and a complete lack of eye protection are some examples. WHO guidance<sup>3</sup> recommends a fluid repellent mask with visor, full sleeved gown and gloves with an apron underneath if the gown is not fluid-repellent. Furthermore, the quantity of PPE so far delivered would be exhausted by a typical practice in less than a week.

The LMC continues to press this issue with the BMA and NHS England that unless and until practices are furnished with appropriate and sufficiently plentiful PPE then **GPs and their staff must not be exposing themselves to cases or potential cases of COVID-19**. Other LMCs and some OOH providers are operating a **"NO PPE, NO SEE"** policy and we support any practices which adopt such a policy.

Patients will either be well enough to self-isolate and self-care or so unwell/unstable that they require assessment and possible testing in an appropriate environment such as a secondary care COVID-19 pod. There is a grey area of patients who fall in between, and who need assessment and care in the community. NHS England has made it clear in their communication of 10<sup>th</sup> March<sup>4</sup> that this care must be provided by a separately commissioned service. We as yet have seen very little evidence of such a service being commissioned but we are clear that this service must not fall to GPs by default.

Where patients appear whilst at the surgery to fit the case criteria for possible COVID-19, if they are well you should be sent home to self-isolate immediately. Where they require immediate and urgent medical attention they should be cared for only with appropriate PPE and in a separate area of the practice designated as a “hot zone” for any such cases which unexpectedly arise.

In addition, we recommend the following measures:

- Reception and admin staff do not need to wear face masks but should stay at least 2 metres away from patients at all times<sup>5</sup>
- All staff, whether clinical or non-clinical should wash their hands regularly with soap and hot water

#### Funding & Remuneration:

The Government has allocated a large quantum of money to the pandemic effort. Our advice to all practices is to keep an accurate log (with evidence) of any costs incurred throughout this pandemic over and above the norm. This may include cancelled training, equipment purchases, locum costs, remote systems etc. When the pandemic is over, these costs can only be reimbursed if they are evidenced. We continue to seek clarification as to how this will happen, but for the time being we advise all constituents to keep a record of these costs so that future provision is not jeopardised once the pandemic is over.

#### Corporate Actions by BBOLMC:

In line with BMA action and guidance, we have taken the decision as an LMC to suspend all face to face meetings for the foreseeable future both to free up our representatives' time but also minimise risk of spread. We continue to liaise in real time and make decisions remotely by virtual means.

The Secretariat is also focusing 100% of its resources on the COVID-19 pandemic to fully support our practices and ensure you have as much information and assistance as you need during this time. If you have any issues, queries or concerns regarding the pandemic please email [ceo@bbolmc.co.uk](mailto:ceo@bbolmc.co.uk) – Replies may be delayed due to demand. All other routine queries regarding other issues will be ignored for the time being.

#### Other Issues:

Other issues the LMC is aware of and which are being addressed are given below with their current status or advice:

Issue	Status
CQC Inspections	Suspended for routine cases from 10am today
eMed3	Can be emailed with no signature
Letters for patients re: travel	NOT GP work, refuse
Suspension of non-core service delivery (eg: DES, QoF, LES)	Being discussed at national level, awaited
IT for remote working	Being discussed at local level, expected this week
Death in Service for locums	Being discussed at national level, awaited
Appraisal & Revalidation emergency provisions	Being discussed at national level, awaited
Indemnity	CNSGP covers all work done, including remote
COVID-19 Testing for frontline staff	Being discussed at national level, finger-prick NPT awaited
Occupational Health service for GPs and staff	Being discussed at national level, awaited

#### Final Remarks:

This is an unprecedented time and a crisis of a scale not seen for generations. The situation will get far worse before it gets better. We are no use to our patients if we do not take care of ourselves. Our strength is in our numbers, and in our resilience as a profession. Your LMC is working hard to protect and support you. Look after each other. Look after yourselves. Stay safe.

Best wishes



Dr. Matt Mayer  
Chief Executive Officer

#### References:

- 1) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/supporting-doctors-covid-19-letter-11-march-2020.pdf>
- 2) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/129/contents/made>
- 3) [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331215/WHO-2019-nCov-IPCPPE\\_use-2020.1-eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331215/WHO-2019-nCov-IPCPPE_use-2020.1-eng.pdf)
- 4) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/preparedness-letter-primary-care-10-march-2020.pdf>
- 5) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-covid-19>