

22 December 2020

To everyone in Somerset

Have a safe and happy Christmas and New Year

Your health and care staff in Somerset, in hospitals, GP practices, social care and community services, are continuing to do a fantastic job of making sure that people get the care they need. Together we are working very hard to keep you safe and well, and ensure services are here for you when you need them - but we need your continued help and support. We write on behalf of colleagues within our organisations to thank you and to ask you to continue to do all you can to stay healthy and well over Christmas and into the New Year.

For many of us Christmas is going to be different this year. Somerset has seen a significant rise in Covid-19 cases over the past few weeks and the Prime Minister's recent announcement about changes to the rules on families meeting up may well affect your plans. Please think carefully about the risks of meeting indoors with relatives and friends, particularly if any of them are elderly or vulnerable.

Anyone can catch Covid-19 and even if you don't have any symptoms, it doesn't mean you do not have the virus. Covid-19 is not going to go away over Christmas or the New Year. The actions we take now can save lives; it is, quite simply, that important.

We are now caring for more patients in our hospitals with confirmed COVID-19 than at any time this year and all our health and care services including GP surgeries and community services are busier than ever. You can help keep our health and care services as safe as possible and help us manage demand on our services by:

- seeking support from your local community pharmacist for minor ailments
- contacting 111 first if you have urgent medical concerns, either by phone or online at <https://111.nhs.uk/>, and the service will provide advice. If you need to be seen, an appointment will be booked for you at the right service.
- if you have any symptoms of Covid-19, please isolate at home and book a test by calling 119. You should only book a test if you have symptoms. There is currently a lot of pressure on testing facilities and booking a test without symptoms could prevent someone in need from booking a slot. If you have any booked appointments, please cancel them and follow the national guidelines.
- if you don't have any symptoms of Covid-19, for now, please continue to attend any booked appointments as advised. You don't need to call us to check that a booked appointment is going ahead. We will contact you if we need to make any changes.

Please also continue to take those simple but effective actions that will help keep you, your family and everyone else as safe as possible.

- Wear a face covering when outside your home and keep a safe space from others. Did you know that a fully grown reindeer is about 2 metres long? That's just the right distance to keep away from others. If you are meeting indoors on Christmas Day, please keep the windows open so that there is plenty of ventilation and don't share cutlery or utensils.
- Wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water. Did you know that 20 seconds is about the time that it takes to sing Jingle Bells to yourself? And regularly wipe down surfaces. Remember: hands, face, space!

As I'm sure you have heard, we have started our Covid-19 vaccination programme in Somerset.

Two weeks ago Yeovil District Hospital (YDH) was announced as one of the first 50 hospital hubs to receive supplies of vaccine and vaccinations at the hospital began in the week beginning 7 December. At the start of last week, vaccinations began at four GP-led sites. Towards the end of last week, vaccinations also began at three further GP-led sites. This is fantastic news and our thanks go out to everyone who has helped make this possible.

The vaccination programme is currently focusing on those aged 80 and over and health and care staff in line with the priorities identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Please don't contact the NHS to seek a vaccine, we will contact you. When we do contact you, please attend your booked appointments. You will be given all the information that you need and we will be able to answer any questions you may have at your vaccination appointment.

You can also help us by volunteering to support our county's vaccination programme. We are looking for people to help us greet people as they come to be vaccinated, marshal, and help with administration. We are also looking for retired or former nurses who are willing to join us as vaccinators. We will, of course, provide all necessary training. If you think you can help please email us on mvp.recruitment@somersetft.nhs.uk to register your interest.

While the vaccination programme offers us a ray of hope as the year draws to a close, we need to keep up our efforts to keep everyone as safe as possible while the vaccination programme rolls out. We also need to continue to look out for our families, neighbours and friends throughout the winter as we look forward with hope to better times next year.

If you are alone or need help, there is a huge amount of support available in Somerset. Please do not struggle in silence.

- You can call The Coronavirus Helpline on **0300 790 6275** for help with food, prescriptions, housing, financial support, emotional support, employment, transport, waste and more. It is open 8am to 6pm, seven days a week, including over Christmas and New Year.
- The CCS Village Agents can provide confidential, practical community-based solutions for food and other support. Visit <https://somersetagents.org/>
- Anyone with concerns around mental health issues and emotional wellbeing can be supported by calling Mindline on **01823 276 892**. The helpline is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- You can also volunteer or request help with the likes of grocery shopping, collecting

medication, combatting loneliness or walking the dog by visiting <https://corona-helpers.co.uk/>

Thank you for everything you are doing to support our services and our colleagues. We wish you all a very happy and healthy Christmas and New Year. We will get through this together.

Dr Berge Balian
Chair, Somerset Primary Care Board

Pat Flaherty
Chief Executive, Somerset County Council

Jonathan Higman
Chief Executive, Yeovil District Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Peter Lewis
Chief Executive, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust

James Rimmer
Chief Executive, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group