

Media release
16 July 2021

Patients still required to wear face coverings in GP practices and other healthcare settings after COVID-19 restrictions ease

Patients in Hertfordshire and west Essex will still be required to wear face coverings in GP practices and other healthcare settings when COVID-19 restrictions ease on Monday.

The guidance from the NHS for healthcare settings has not changed, and patients who are not exempt from wearing a face covering should continue to wear one, follow social distancing and hand hygiene guidance. If patients are exempt from wearing a mask, a face shield may be offered as an alternative.

COVID-19 infection rates are rising in all areas of the country which means its vitally important we continue to do all we can against the virus. Wearing a face covering is an effective way of reducing transmission. It's also really important that anyone who is eligible for a vaccine and hasn't yet come forward does so without delay, it's the best defence we have against COVID-19.

Dr Jane Halpin, Joint Chief Executive Officer, Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System and Clinical Commissioning Groups said: "We need to continue to do what we can to keep people safe from catching Covid-19 in healthcare settings. One way we can all help with this is by continuing to wear a face-covering and we are asking all patients to do that, as well as staff. Keeping staff safe is essential to keep operating efficiently.

"We are also continuing to make sure we don't have large numbers of patients in waiting areas– again this is about reducing the chance of infection when there are rising rates in the community.

"The various measures we have taken, including increased use of personal protective equipment, patients wearing face masks, holding more virtual consultations, social distancing and extra premises cleans have helped protect staff, patients and visitors over the past year. Taking these steps has also enabled us to continue providing many of the non-urgent services that would otherwise have been postponed.

"We want to make sure you can all be confident about accessing or visiting local healthcare services safely.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. General practice is open for business but where possible please contact them by phone or online before entering the building.



2. Urgent care is still available for those who need it, so we would urge people not to be put off coming forward. We continue to encourage people to use 111 first for urgent care so that they can be directed to the best local service for them, or 999 for life-threatening illness or injuries.
3. For more information and questions and answers about the COVID-19 vaccines and the roll-out of the vaccination programme in Hertfordshire and west Essex, go to: <https://covid.healthierfuture.org.uk>
4. Integrated Care Systems. In May 2020 Hertfordshire and west Essex Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) became one of the 18 Integrated Care Systems across the country. In an integrated care system, NHS organisations, in partnership with local councils and others, take collective responsibility for managing resources, delivering NHS standards, and improving the health of the population they serve.
5. To find out more about the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System (ICS), see www.healthierfuture.org.uk
6. For media queries, please contact enquiries@healthierfuture.nhs.uk or ring 01707 685140.