

Like all parts of the NHS, community pharmacies are facing huge challenges in the ongoing response to COVID-19.

Throughout the pandemic it will be critical that Essex pharmacy teams are able to continue their important work getting Essex patients' medicines to them safely and in good time. Pharmacies are also continuing in their role as first port of call for other, unrelated minor illnesses when GP appointments may be more difficult to access, and they continue to be a trusted source of information for patients during these uncertain times.

However, due to the increasing pressures on them, many pharmacies are having to take measures to ensure the safety of their staff and their customers. We ask the Essex public respect these measures, and recognise pharmacy teams as the NHS front-line service that they are.

Along with other parts of the NHS many pharmacies are struggling to manage staff shortages, for example where people are self-isolating or in a vulnerable group, and so remaining staff are working long hours to meet demand. As they come under increased pressure, affected pharmacies are having to take steps to ensure that they can continue to safely supply the medicines and products that people need. These steps may include:

- Operating on a "closed-door" basis at some times during the day. This allows pharmacy teams to dispense medicines safely without distraction, and to meet the increased demand for prescription medicines.
- Limiting the sale or supply of some products, for example paracetamol, hand sanitisers and baby (formula) milk. The NHS has asked all pharmacies to do this to ensure that there are enough supplies for everyone who **needs** them.
- Asking customers and patients to maintain the same social distancing rules as any other space, which is to keep 2m (6 feet) away from other people when inside the pharmacy. This may mean that the number of customers allowed in the pharmacy at any time is limited.
- Stopping some services, such as blood pressure readings or medication reviews, and providing some other services in different ways, such as by phone.

Essex Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) is the representative organisation for all community pharmacies in Essex. To help our pharmacies to cope with the current increased pressure we are asking all Essex patients and residents to:

- Avoid going to pharmacies if you have any symptoms of COVID-19: If you have a dry, persistent cough, fever or shortness of breath, please don't go to your pharmacy, instead use the 111 coronavirus service online or by phone.
- Be patient: All pharmacies are under a lot of pressure and working extra hours to ensure that you get what you need **safely**. Note any temporary changes that your regular pharmacy may be making to its normal opening hours because of reduced staffing levels.
- Respect pharmacy staff: they are providing NHS services and deserve the same respect as any other frontline NHS worker. Follow any social distancing requirements at the pharmacy including barriers or floor markings, limited access and queueing arrangements.
- Request your prescription medicines and purchase pharmacy products as normal: there is no need to stockpile, There are enough medicines in the system for everyone. We are all in this together, and we need to remember that stockpiling causes problems for more vulnerable people in our communities.

Thank you.