



NHS England and NHS Improvement
Skipton House
80 London Road
London
SE1 6LH

30 July 2020

Dear Jeremy,

Pathways for COVID-19 positive patients

Thank you for your letter of the 23 July 2020 to Simon Stevens. In it you asked about late presentation of COVID-19 patients, mortality risks, and early intervention.

While knowledge of Covid-19 has been developing internationally over the course of the pandemic, from the outset our clinical guidance has highlighted the need rapidly to assess patients with possible COVID-19 related symptoms, whether face-to-face or virtually. The NHS issued guidance to all clinicians on [17 March](#) highlighting the importance of measuring oxygen saturation levels through pulse oximeters. Aligned guidance was created across all healthcare settings, to improve coordination and help move towards a standardised recognition, escalation and intervention system for COVID-19. In order to identify and spot early deterioration in primary care, we have [provided resources](#) for COVID-19 remote assessment and monitoring and virtual ward guidance for primary care and care homes.

The strategy is based on the need to test for COVID-19, check oxygen saturations and then give appropriate patients home monitoring equipment and advice for escalation. In early April, NHSE/I purchased 210,000 oximeters for distribution to GPs and care homes for use in monitoring suspected COVID patients. We are now running 15 pilots to test the virtual ward strategy ahead of any potential second surge.

NHSE/I rapidly expanded the 111 service and established an enhanced national clinical COVID-19 advice service that ensured best possible advice was available to any callers. The public used NHS 111 in record numbers, both online and via telephone. At the outset of the outbreak a specific COVID-19 algorithm was introduced which regularly enhanced our developing understanding of the disease, its symptoms and progression. Guidance and software has been regularly updated to reflect national and international guidance and science.

We are all dealing with an unprecedented public health challenge and of course acknowledge that front line clinicians are constantly learning about the disease, its care and treatment. We will therefore continue to keep under review the points raised by your correspondents, in conjunction with the Royal College of Physicians and others.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Stephen Powis
NHS National Medical Director

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