

**Friday 17 December 2021**

## **Plea for local people to play their part in supporting extremely busy health and care services this festive season**

Ahead of what is expected to be a very challenging festive season, people living in Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire are being advised of the best ways to support local health and care services.

Over the next few weeks, demand for local services is expected to be pushed to the limit with more and more people coming forward for care after testing positive for the Omicron variant of Covid-19.

One way in which people can support the system at this busy time is by helping loved-ones who are well enough to leave hospital to continue their recovery at home.

Often, people who are well enough to leave hospital and continue their recovery at home are unable to do so due to not having the support needed to carry out essential everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning and shopping for groceries.

Family and friends who can lend a hand with these small jobs, or even just provide a person with a lift home from hospital, will be helping their loved-ones get home sooner, while also freeing up valuable bed space for new patients.

Dr Ruth Grabham, Medical Director, Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group, said: “When patients aren’t able to leave hospital quickly and safely when they are well enough, it prevents new patients from being given a bed straight away, meaning very sick people having to be cared for in emergency departments or in the back of ambulances.

“As well as this, an extended hospital stay can also be detrimental to a person’s overall recovery and lead to preventable health issues, such as muscle loss, pressure sores, and hospital-acquired infections.”

GP practices across the region are also gearing up for a difficult end to 2021, as many primary care staff step away from routine, surgery-based work to provide essential frontline support to the Covid-19 vaccination effort, which is being asked to increase vaccine delivery by up to 200 per cent.

Although appointments will still be available for those in need of urgent care, people are, wherever possible, being asked to use alternative services for help with minor conditions.

Local pharmacies can provide quick help and support for a wide range of issues, with most sites having private treatment rooms in which trained staff can carry out consultations before prescribing treatment or, where appropriate, arranging an appointment with another healthcare service.

A selection of local pharmacies, including Boots in Bath city centre, Jhoots Pharmacy on Victoria Road in Swindon and Lyneham Pharmacy in Wiltshire, will be open on Christmas Day.

More pharmacies will be open across the other festive bank holidays, with a complete list of opening times available to view on the CCG website.

In addition, medical help for urgent but not life-threatening conditions can be found via the NHS 111 online service, which has a detailed symptom checker and can direct people to appropriate nearby healthcare options.

People can further show their support by continuing to follow all current government guidance around coronavirus, such as mask-wearing, social distancing and getting the Covid-19 vaccine when eligible.

Kate Blackburn, Director of Public Health for Wiltshire, said: “The rise of the Omicron variant means there is a renewed ask for people to not only get their booster vaccination but also to be extra careful at Christmas, as we know this strain of Covid-19 is more transmissible than what we’ve seen before.

“Luckily, what is being asked is what we have all become experts at over the last year or so, which is to limit our social interactions, maintain good hand hygiene and wear a mask when in an indoor public place.”

Further details about local health and care services is available at [www.bswccg.nhs.uk](http://www.bswccg.nhs.uk), while general information on staying well, including advice on how to deal with symptoms at home, can be found at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).