Pharmacy opening & ways of working

Like general practice, some community pharmacies are beginning to work in different ways this week to help protect their teams, patients and the public – largely in response to huge increasing workload of walk-in patients, minor illness, access to medicines (prescription & OTC), picking up additional workload. This may include:

- Limiting the number of people within the pharmacy at the same time
- Sectioning the pharmacy to encourage social distancing (at least 2 metres) for people coming into the pharmacy with floor markings (using tape) or barriers (if possible)
- Using a hatch (mainly for out of hours pharmacies) for pick up and drop offs

Pharmacies will remain open wherever possible, but you may see that some are now having to reduce the hours during which they can admit members of the public i.e. closed door working. This is to ensure that pharmacy teams have time for cleaning, to safely deal with high volumes of work and allow time for teams to briefly recover before going again.

On 22 March 2020, NHSE&I updated its COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for community pharmacies, giving pharmacies some flexibility in the hours in which they need to open to the public:

- Pharmacies may close their doors to the public for up to 2.5 hours a day, including lunch.
- Community pharmacies are expected to be open to the public between 10am-12 noon and 2pm-4pm as a minimum (if these are contracted core or supplementary hours).
- Similarly, 100 hours pharmacies should be open from 10am–12pm and 2pm–6pm as a minimum.

No notification to NHSE&I is required for opening hours flexibility (closed-door working).

There may be longer closures for deep cleans or workforce shortages. In addition, some community pharmacies situated in other premises, for example, GP practices, supermarkets and shopping arcades may have other reasonable cause to close, due to circumstances beyond their control.

In these situations, pharmacies will endeavour to make arrangements with one or more community pharmacies situated in the same area, inform local GP practices and the NHS England Regional Team.

National guidance for community pharmacy has been published which addresses opening hours, responsible pharmacist and unplanned (emergency) closures and CPWY will be signposting pharmacy contractors this alongside the updated NHS COVID-19 community pharmacy SOP (revised 22nd March 2020).

These are unprecedented times and exceptional measures may be required to ensure patient and public safety, as well as the safety and welfare of the pharmacy team.