

Update from NHS Devon

October 2024

Winter vaccinations

UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) data shows over the past two winters at least 18,000 deaths were associated with flu, despite last winter being a relatively mild flu season.

While pandemic restrictions and social behaviours saw flu levels fall dramatically for a few years, these latest mortality figures are a stark reminder that flu is a deadly virus, particularly for older people and other groups at greatest risk.

Of real concern is the drop in the flu vaccine uptake rates last winter across all eligibility groups in the South West and England compared with the previous year.[\[1\]](#)

While uptake in older people in the South West last year remained high (81% uptake), 46% of people with long-term health conditions, 37% of pregnant women and 51% of 2-and-3-year-olds received the vaccine.

To help reduce the impact of winter viruses on those most at risk, as well as ease NHS winter pressures, the NHS launched a scaled-up Get Winter Strong campaign on 7 October.

The campaign urges those eligible to get their flu and COVID-19 vaccination when invited, ahead of winter, targeting those at greatest risk.

Pregnant women and older people aged 75-79 are eligible for a [RSV vaccination](#) for the first time this year, with the maternal vaccine providing strong protection for newborns in their first few months, when they are most at risk of severe illness from RSV.

The schools programme also began in early September, with those aged 4 up to the age of 16 (school year 11) being offered a nasal spray vaccine, or an injection if this is unsuitable.

Locally, to date since the start of the vaccination programme in September 2024:

- 15% of the eligible population have been vaccinated for flu and covid
- 20,000 over 75's and pregnant women have been vaccinated for RSV - 25% of eligible population
- Devon is the best performing area in the South West region for flu vaccination of 2 and 3 year olds.

Financial update

As part of the 2024/25 planning round, One Devon submitted a final deficit plan of £80 million. The ICS forecasting at month 4 (July) is to deliver the plan for the year. The year-to-date position is adverse by £2.8 million, reflecting the financial impact of industrial action.

The system is reporting £33.4 million efficiency achievement in the first quarter of the year. This is £0.2 million above plan. The forecast is to achieve the savings plan of £213.3 million.

We are working hard to deliver the plan but unexpected issues, including industrial action, are making this challenging.

As a system, we remain in the highest level (segment 4) of the NHS Oversight Framework (NOF4) due to a range of longstanding challenges, including service performance (such as urgent and elective care) and finance. This means we get 'intensive' support from NHS England – which includes additional reporting requirements and financial controls.

To achieve the criteria for moving out of NOF4, we are refocusing and reprioritising our work, our efforts and some of our resources and staff in the short-term.

Accomplishing this will give us more control over our future – helping us to provide safe, timely and affordable care, as well as focusing on the long-term priorities that we are all keen to work on.

New Partnership formed for GP homeless service – Exeter and Barnstaple

A new community interest company – Inclusion Health Devon (IncluDe) has been awarded the contract to provide primary medical care GP services to the homeless and vulnerably housed in Exeter and Barnstaple following a competitive procurement process.

Inclusion Health Devon took over the running of the Clock Tower Surgery in Exeter and has now established a permanent service at the Freedom Centre in Barnstaple, following the success of the previous pilot project. They are a newly formed Community Interest Company (CIC) set up by clinicians (GPs and nurses) from both the Clock Tower Surgery in Exeter and Freedom Centre service in Barnstaple, who have many years of experience in delivering care to inclusion health groups.

By uniting the two services, the organisation is able to offer enhanced, specialist care, ensuring that patients benefit from the collective expertise and collaborative approach across both sites.

Patients in Barnstaple are already seeing the benefits of this new service, with several expressing that the care provided has been “a lifeline” and that it’s “the only service that truly understands our needs.”

In the longer term, there is a wider Devon ambition being developed, bringing together key organisations, agencies, and voluntary sector to work together to improve the health and social wellbeing of this client group and improve access equitably across Devon in primary care. The service differs to that of standard general practice and offers a bespoke service specifically tailored to people experiencing homelessness. It aims to:

- Improve health outcomes and reduced mortality rates for the practice population.
- Increase engagement with, and trust of, health services and those providing them
- Increase uptake of vaccination and screening offers, reducing incidence of infectious diseases
- Successfully transfer patients to mainstream general practice, with continued engagement with primary care services.
- Reduce ED attendances and emergency admissions by this patient group
- Reduce average duration of these admissions through multi-agency discharge planning
- Reduce emergency (unplanned) admissions into mental health secondary care services
- Deliver joint care plans

NHS 10-year plan

Partners in Devon will be helping to shape a national 10-year plan, which will include engaging with staff and communities, following an announcement by the Government in September.

An [independent investigation into the NHS](#) was published on 12 September, highlighting key issues for the health service to address.

Led by surgeon, independent peer and former health minister Professor Lord Darzi, its insights will set inform the Government's recently announced 10-year plan for the NHS.

Key findings from the [142-page report](#) include:

1. Deterioration: The health of the nation has deteriorated over the past 15 years, with a substantial increase in the number of people living with multiple long-term conditions
2. Spending: Too great a share of the NHS budget is being spent in hospitals, too little in the community, and productivity is too low
3. Waiting times: Waiting lists have swelled and waiting times have surged, with A&E queues more than doubling from an average of just under 40 people on a typical evening in April 2009 to over 100 in April 2024. 1 in 10 patients are now waiting for 12 hours or more
4. Cancer care: The UK has appreciably higher cancer mortality rates than other countries, with no progress whatsoever made in diagnosing cancer at stage one and two between 2013 and 2021
5. Lasting damage: The Health and Social Care Act of 2012 did lasting damage to the management capacity and capability of the NHS. It took 10 years to return to a sensible structure, and the effects continue to be felt to this day
6. Productivity: Too many resources have been being poured into hospitals where productivity had substantially fallen, while too little has been spent in the community.

In response, the Government response has said that three "big shifts" are needed, from:

1. Hospital to community care
2. Analogue to digital
3. Treating sickness to preventing it.

Further details on the plan and how local staff, people and communities can get involved will be shared in due course.

Pharmacy closures

Not all pharmacies that close cause a gap – for example, some neighbouring pharmacies have capacity and it can make them more resilient. Pharmacy need is assessed through Devon County Council's Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), which, can be found [here](#).

NHS Devon has established a community pharmacy development group to look at what the ICB could so support the sector - more details of which will be provided in our pharmacy strategy, which is currently being produced and is due to be published later this year. This includes input from NHS England, the ICB and community pharmacy. They have reviewed the process for responding to closures. Analysis of the data includes causes of fragility. Our local priority is supporting uptake of nationally commissioned services (Pharmacy First, hypertension, contraception, dispensing medicine, etc).

We have gained agreement from the Health and Wellbeing Boards across Devon to go ahead early with refreshing the Pharmacy Needs Assessment (PNA).

Entry into pharmacy is highly regulated therefore can take some time for applications to come in and go through governance processes. However, we have seen some new pharmacies open.

Under the [Pharmacy First Service](#), patients can now get treatment for seven common conditions at their high street pharmacy without needing to see a GP. In Devon, nearly all pharmacies are offering this NHS service making it easier and more convenient for people to access care. Community pharmacists also offer help and advice on a wide range of symptoms and other minor illnesses, such as hay fever, acne, dry skin, mouth ulcers and indigestion and in March we [announced](#) that women are now being offered free contraceptive pills in pharmacies.

A new school of pharmacy [has recently opened](#) in Plymouth – it is an excellent opportunity to enter a great career and profession and there is a real need for more pharmacists in the south west.

Improving dental access

In the South West, NHS Devon is working in partnership with the NHS South West Collaborative Commissioning Hub (CCH), local dentists and other Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to develop its South West Dental Recovery Plan. The plan sets out to address the issues facing the sector and improve access to dental services for local people.

NHS Devon is reviewing its plans in light of the published national [Dental Recovery Plan on 7 February 2024](#). Local plans will continue to be aligned to national priorities, and ensure the needs of local communities are being prioritised.

There are several measures in place across the region to increase dental access for patients. These include:

- NHS England is commissioning additional urgent dental care appointments that people can access by calling NHS111 with an urgent dental need.
- NHS England has commissioned 'stabilisation sessions' (see below) across the South West, with 64 practices now providing over 1000 appointments every week

- NHS Devon has commissioned additional children’s orthodontic capacity in the South West, with 20 orthodontic practices
- NHS Devon is supporting an oral health improvement initiative called First Dental Steps where health visitors and midwives are trained to give oral health care advice to families with children under two and have oral health care packs (toothbrushes and toothpaste) to give to families in need. This work is being undertaken in partnership with local authorities.
- Supervised toothbrushing programmes are running in schools in areas of deprivation across the South West and NHS Devon is working with the Local Authorities across Devon to invest in further cohorts of children

Urgent care

Urgent dental care is available via NHS 111 for those without a regular dentist. If any individual has a dental emergency, there are arrangements in place to ensure that anyone who does not have a dentist and has an urgent dental need can access an urgent dental appointment.

The current urgent care and stabilisation contracts have been extended for 12 months while a review is underway and the expressions of interest for additional providers in 2024/25 have now been issued.

- Priority focus area is Children Looked After - a child or young person who is being cared for by their local authority. They might be living in a children’s home, or with foster parents, or in some other family arrangement.
- This will be followed by additional expressions of interest for both stabilisation and urgent care (providers now being selected).
- NHS Devon is supportive of any new providers and capacity coming into the market, but the provider selection regime must be followed.
- NHS Devon will work with local providers to improve local dental services together.
- NHS Devon is appointing to vacant dental commissioning roles in the ICB and once they are in place, they will be setting up a provider engagement forum.

Stabilisation services

- A new pathway is being implementing for those who do not have access to a regular dentist but the urgent care pathway is not appropriate - a stabilisation pathway.
- Stabilisation sessions are for patients who seek urgent care and who are identified during the appointment as having several additional dental issues that need addressing imminently. Patients can access stabilisation dental care by calling 111.
- 64 practices in the South West offer stabilisation appointments, seeing approximately 1000 patients per week.
- NHS England (NHSE) South West, on behalf of the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in the South West region, is recommissioning NHS stabilisation services across the South West and seek to determine the level of market interest in the provision of these services. NHSE is in the early stages of engagement and has undertaken a series of initial market engagement events in June 2024.
- Stabilisation deals with the provision of a definitive course of treatment for patients without access to an NHS dentists who may have a urgent care need, or are in need of dental intervention to prevent their condition worsening and requiring urgent treatment.
- Stabilisation should stabilise the dental issue over a course of treatment that, in the clinical judgement of the dentist, will prevent the person from accessing urgent care with the same issue within the following 12 months.
- The service criteria is:

Patients that have had an urgent care treatment, do not have an NHS dentist to request further treatment, and require further stabilisation treatment to stop them presenting to Urgent Care within the next 12 months.

and/or

Patients with high level of dental need, that does not meet the urgent care criteria, i.e. broken teeth, broken or lost fillings, loose, broken, or displaced crowns, bridges, or veneers, and broken, lost or ill-fitting dentures.

Implementing new average UDA value and re-basing contracts

NHS Devon ICB have uplifted all contracts to the £28 unit of dental activity (UDA) rate mandated in the Dental Recovery Plan.

Work has also begun on a wider strategic review of UDA approach and strategy across the South West. Due to the complexity of this work, it is not possible to confirm a date of completion at this stage.

Procurement

NHS Devon is currently reviewing contracts handed back in 2023/24 and commit to commission further dental high street access in 2024/25. Rapid procurement launched in September 2024.

Oral health improvement

There are a number of children-focused initiatives underway across the South West to try and improve the oral health of our children, detailed below, and health visitors provide advice and support to parents about healthy feeding options for babies and toddlers.

There are plans for dental campaigns to be rolled out nationally with local authorities that will focus on prevention and good dental health.

First Dental Steps programme

- The First Dental Steps programme is an oral health improvement intervention, embedded in the Healthy Child Programme. It incorporates public health and NICE recommendations into a multi-stranded oral health initiative and builds on the learning from a recent pilot delivered across six South West sites.
- In the short-term it is anticipated that the intervention has the potential to support the promotion of preventive dental care for children aged 0-2 years. The universal element of the programme has the potential to impact upon 163,000 children (aged 0-2 years old) across the South West, with a targeted offer to approximately 4,000 vulnerable children.
- In the longer term it is expected that implementation will support the realisation of the following benefits:
 - An increase in dental access and attendance for children aged 0-2 years;
 - A reduction in the prevalence and severity of dental caries, alongside a reduction in oral health inequalities in young children;
 - A reduction in hospital-based tooth extractions for children due to dental decay.

- Health visitors and community nurses have received training in oral health promotion, so they can support families with young children in providing evidence-based advice, alongside toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste packs. Children at high risk of decay are identified and referred directly to community dental teams for further help where needed.
- This programme is already running in Torbay and Plymouth.
- This scheme complements the existing Brighter Smiles programme run in a few areas, which is aimed at 3–5-year-olds.
- Work is ongoing with the ICBs towards an anticipated continuation of the programme in 24/25, and to being extended to other areas in the South West.

Supervised toothbrushing and fluoride varnish programmes

- Programmes are currently underway to give children time and supervision to brush their own teeth at nursery and reception class in some areas, making brushing part of children’s everyday routine and helping to protect their teeth from decay.
- Dental professionals visit some nurseries and schools to apply fluoride varnish to children’s teeth, with parents’ consent.
- Supervised toothbrushing schemes are already running in the Devon ICB area.
- The roll out will be targeted to areas where children are at increased risk of developing tooth decay, such as in areas of high deprivation.
- Providers of the service will work together with colleagues involved in oral health promotion across the region to ensure the successful roll out and reach of this service, including working with the local authority to identify schools in the most deprived areas, before linking with these schools to introduce the project and engage with the school staff and the parents.
- NHS Devon is working with the Local Authorities across Devon to invest in further cohorts of children for both supervised toothbrushing and fluoride varnish programmes for 2024/25.

Workforce

The South West will expand dental placements by 24% by 2028/29, taking the overall number that year to 1,000 places.

Work is also underway through the establishment of Centres for Dental Development to bring together dental education and training with service delivery models, particularly in areas where there is a shortage of workforce relative to population needs.

There will be an expansion to training places and the Department of Health and Social Care will confirm following through on entry changes to allow therapists and hygienists to work with full scope regarding anaesthetics and fluoride varnish.

Matthew Jerreat has been appointed as the regional Chief Dental Officer for the South West. NHS Devon is currently recruiting to a Dental Clinical Advisor in NHS Devon ICB.

Dental recruitment incentive scheme 2024/25

- The offer of incentive (‘golden hello’) payments has been used in different parts of the NHS to aid recruitment in areas of the country that have traditionally been hard to recruit to.
- The aim of the Dental Recruitment Incentive Scheme (DRIS) is to help practices that are struggling to attract people through the usual recruitment routes by supporting them to offer a financial incentive. The scheme is designed to encourage relocation to areas with

workforce challenges, to attract new workforce to the NHS, and to retain those who might have otherwise moved into private practice.

- A 'golden hello' bonus incentive payment of £20,000 will be offered per dentist for up to 240 dentists.
- The South West region has been allocated 58 'golden hellos' and we are in the process of determining how many of those will be allocated to Devon.

Access

Emergency dental access	Routine dentist access
<p>In clinical hours contact the Devon helpline operated by Access Dental - 03330 063 300. Patients will be referred to the closest emergency provider or allocated an appointment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Torbay - 01803 217777• Plymouth - 01752 4234664• Exeter and rest of Devon - 03330 063 300	<p>Contact Devon and Cornwall waiting list managed by Dental Access - 03330 063 300.</p>

There is a page on the [One Devon website](#) dedicated to local information about NHS dental services, which is regularly updated with key information and signposting.

Registration with an NHS dentist

Patients are not registered with a dental practice in the same way as they are with a general practice, although some dental practices might see patients on a regular basis. Instead, dental practices are contracted to deliver activity and are obliged to only deliver a course of treatment to an individual, irrelevant of where they live, and not to deliver ongoing regular care.

There is no geographical restriction on which practice a patient may attend, allowing patients the choice of where they would like to receive a course of treatment, as long as the practice is accepting new patients.

Dental practices are independent businesses, often providing a combination of NHS and private dentistry. Practices providing NHS treatment are listed on the [NHS website](#) and they update this list themselves. Neither NHS England or commissioners hold information on practices who are currently accepting new patients, and practices can close their lists at any time if they are full.