

Our services:

Emergency and urgent care
Non-emergency patient transport
NHS 111



**North West
Ambulance Service**
NHS Trust



AMBULANCE NEWS – 6 APRIL 2020 COVID-19

COVID-19 Brief 02

In view of the coronavirus pandemic and the unprecedented pressures being faced by the NHS as a whole, and following our previous briefing, we felt it was important to further brief you on the trust's current position. We will continue to provide further briefings over the next coming weeks and months to ensure you are fully briefed as the situation develops.

We have extensive plans that have been in action since the outbreak began, along with the rest of the NHS and UK Government. We are linked in with regional and national colleagues at the highest level on a daily basis to share information and best practice to inform our response. As the situation evolves, so do our plans to manage it and we are already implementing a variety of additional measures.

Below is a list of our top priorities, with more detailed information below:

- **Increasing 999 and NHS 111 call handling, clinical and dispatch capacity at pace**
- **Increasing our Paramedic Emergency Ambulance fleet at pace**
- **Ensuring the flow of PPE and equipment**
- **Staff and volunteer welfare including staff COVID-19 testing**
- **Increasing our critical care transport and co-ordination capacity which includes supporting the new Nightingale Hospital in Manchester**

To ensure we can maintain an effective and response service, we have secured more than 60 additional ambulances to support the paramedic emergency service, together with the use of voluntary ambulance services.

With regards to our non-emergency patient transport service (PTS) our commissioners have agreed to a temporary suspension of conveyance to routine outpatient and clinic appointments. The PTS will still be transporting renal, end of life and cancer patients and will continue to provide discharge and transfer services.

A joint HM Government/NHS document 'COVID-19 Hospital Discharge Service Requirements' published on 19 March 2020 sets out the hospital discharge service requirements for all NHS trusts; with the aim to free up at least 15,000 hospital beds nationally. To support this action, the patient transport service (PTS) has created a Discharge Coordination Hub (DCH) which commenced operation on Monday 30 March 2020. The DCH will operate between 0800-midnight, 7 days a week, including bank holidays and will co-ordinate all ambulance discharge requirement of hospitals in the North West.

Due to the reduction on PTS services, this has enabled approximately 200 PTS care assistants, who are currently undergoing training, to support our emergency service clinicians, our Emergency Operations Centres and NHS 111. A number of PTS staff have already completed their training and commenced their new roles this past weekend.

As with all NHS trusts, staff welfare is of paramount importance. We are working hard to ensure our staff have easy access to all clinical and non-clinical guidance and advice, detailed information on PPE, guidance on homeworking (where this is possible), health and wellbeing support and the additional opportunities that are being offered to ensure as many staff as possible are operational.

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Chairman: Peter White

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Delivering the right care, at the right time, in the right place; every time

We have welcomed whole health economy COVID-19 testing at designated sites in Morecambe Bay, Blackpool, Preston and Manchester Airport for our frontline staff (and families where applicable). We are actively seeking sites in Cheshire and Merseyside and progress is being made. Further work is required to automate the notification of results from the laboratories back to us.

Our staff have responded exceptionally well during what is a very challenging time for them professionally and personally, and I have extended my thanks to them for their ongoing commitment and dedication.

As mentioned in the previous briefing, we are continuing to experience high demand on our 999 service which is approximately 6% higher than we would normally expect. Some parts of the region have seen a rise of over 10% in demand with 5,000 999 calls being received in a single day. We are also experiencing continual high demand on our NHS 111 telephone service which on some days has risen to over 15,000 calls a day. An average normal day is around 4,000 to 5,000 calls. We have posted a series of social media messages to try and reduce the pressures by asking members of the public to only call 999 in an emergency and to use the NHS 111 online service when possible to get advice on suspected coronavirus cases. We will continue to use our communication channels to reinforce the government's stay at home message as well as our own service demand messages.

We have focused efforts on supporting the wider healthcare system by reducing the number of people taken to hospital and increasing the number of patients receiving the right care over the telephone (hear and treat) or on scene (see and treat). Over the previous weeks we have managed 60% more incidents through hear and treat and took 4,000 fewer patients into hospital, when compared to the same period in 2019.

On 3 April 2020 the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) used to process 999 calls was updated to include Protocol 36: Pandemic, Epidemic and Outbreak. Protocol 36 is a specialist protocol that helps with the triage and management of pandemics, epidemics and outbreaks of flu patients, including the coronavirus (COVID-19) and by utilising this protocol, it will help us manage resources more effectively when responding to patients.

To further support the delivery of service, we are engaging with hospital trusts to ask them to work with us by ensuring hospital handovers are kept to 15 minutes as much as possible, which will enable valuable resources to be freed up to respond to emergencies. Where possible we are introducing ambulance cleaning at hospital sites. This will be undertaken by a specialist team who will clean the vehicle whilst the crew are handing over their patient to hospital clinicians.

In addition to this, there are a number of actions we're also undertaking. Firstly we are working on increasing staff in our Emergency Operations Centres (999 call centres), with the aim to double our call taking capacity in the next two weeks. We have 191 people have been recruited and booked in for training.

The trust has a high number of Community First Responders (CFRs) who respond in their local communities supporting the delivery of emergency care to patients prior to an ambulance arriving at the scene. These highly valued members of our team are continuing to support us by safely responding to incidents; and many have increased the number of hours they volunteer for us to further help us at this extremely busy time.

We also have over 270 CFRs offering additional support ranging from the packaging and distribution of PPE, vehicle cleaning, and welfare check on ambulance crews. They are also offering to provide support to NHS 111 in a non-clinical capacity and help with COVID-19 testing of our staff with clinicians.

In relation to the new NHS Nightingale Hospital, we have a senior management team aligned to this important priority with operational, resilience and planning and emergency operations centre responsibilities. They are working with colleagues across health and social care, with local authorities and the military. Work is underway to plan for the opening of this new hospital and how we will facilitate the transportation of hundreds of patients to the new hospital site. Unlike the London Nightingale, the Manchester NHS Nightingale Hospital will be a step-down facility for patients who have already been cared for in hospitals across the North West. We are currently developing plans on how we will manage the process of transfers and discharges from the facility and will be calling on a number of NWS departments to support this huge project. This is a fast moving and evolving project that is critical to our ability to care for patients in the North West.

Finally, we would like to pass on our thanks for your continued support at this challenging time for us all. We have received numerous offers of help and support for our staff and this is very much appreciated.

If you would like any further information or have any questions regarding our response to COVID-19, please do not hesitate to contact us via communications@nwas.nhs.uk