

'Think 111'

National context

During the peak months of the coronavirus pandemic the number of people attending Emergency Departments or A&E reduced dramatically, particularly those seeking help for minor illnesses.

However, in recent weeks the number of people visiting Emergency Departments has risen, and in some places, risen sharply. At the same time, due to social distancing and infection precautions, the space in those departments is reduced by 30-50%.

We need to keep patients and NHS staff safe throughout our services. This includes being able to provide emergency care safely for the most vulnerable and shielded patients at a time when we want to ensure care is available for those who need it, while ensuring appropriate distancing in waiting rooms.

The NHS must now guide the public in making the right healthcare choices to ensure their safety, as well as making sure they get the right treatment in the most appropriate place. This will also help to keep staff safe.

What is 'Think 111'?

'Think 111' is a national programme that aims to improve the way that patients access urgent care by ensuring that they receive the right care in the most appropriate setting first time, with the lowest level of risk of acquiring a hospital or health care related infection.

This need has always been present but has been brought into focus during the coronavirus pandemic, which now moving to the endemic phase is a catalyst for such change to now occur at pace.

Based on 'talk before you walk' principles, the programme will focus on using NHS 111 to reduce unnecessary attendances to Emergency Departments by supporting the public to access the right services in their area. The Programme will allow NHS 111 to book patients directly into a variety of services out of hospital - including primary care - and within assessment areas within acute hospitals.

NHS 111 will also be able to book patients into the Emergency Department when it is best for their needs.



What does this mean?

The public will be asked to contact NHS 111 before attending an Emergency Department.

In return, the public will benefit from being directed to the right service for them. This could be an appointment with their GP or dentist or a timeslot at an Emergency Department. This will provide a better experience and help to keep the public and NHS services safe.

However, nobody that attends an Emergency Department without having contacted NHS 111 beforehand will be turned away.

What's happening now?

A number of 'first mover' areas across the country are currently introducing the Think 111 principles, beginning with Portsmouth and London. It is expected that all areas across the country will develop a similar model ahead of this coming winter.

In Herefordshire and Worcestershire, we have been asked to be one of the systems in the Midlands to introduce this model. We have therefore begun discussions with local partners and clinicians about the design and delivery of an approach that will work for our local population.

We will keep stakeholders continually updated with developments and work with partners to develop a comprehensive communication plan for the programme.

- For any further information on 'Think 111' please contact hw.comms@nhs.net -

