

Swine Flu update

3 November 2009

For immediate release

Think twice before going to emergency departments this winter, say A&E experts

*West Kent urged to choose health services well to reduce pressure on the health
system*

Health professionals in West Kent are urging the public to look after themselves and think twice about the health services they use this winter. The coming winter could be one of the toughest winters yet for the NHS, with swine flu combining with regular winter pressures, such as seasonal flu, to put extra pressure on emergency services and GPs.

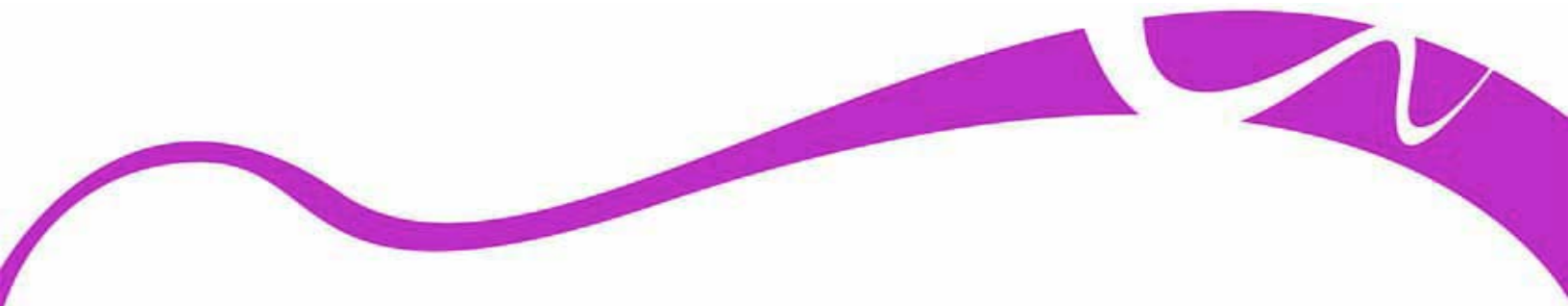
Every year, winter is the busiest season for accident and emergency (A&E) departments. However there is a wide range of other health services available to the public that may be more suitable – such as the NHS Direct web and telephone service, pharmacists, NHS walk-in centres and GPs.

Dr Julian Webb, clinical lead for A&E services at Maidstone and Kent & Sussex Hospitals, said:

“Winter is one of the busiest times of the year for A&E departments with a range of potentially serious illnesses and injuries accompanying the cold weather.

“People can help ensure patients who most need the help of their local hospitals are cared for quickly by following the simple advice in this year’s Choose Well campaign.

“With seasonal flu and swine flu circulating this winter, in addition to all the regular winter pressures we face in A&E, we really need people in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells to think about the service that is right for them.



“Emergency services are for severe injuries and symptoms of severe illness, such as choking, chest pain, sudden collapse and blood loss. There are a wide range of services out there for other health issues, such as pharmacists, GPs and a wealth of information and advice through NHS direct.”

Sharon Jones, Director of Resilience Planning, NHS West Kent, commented:

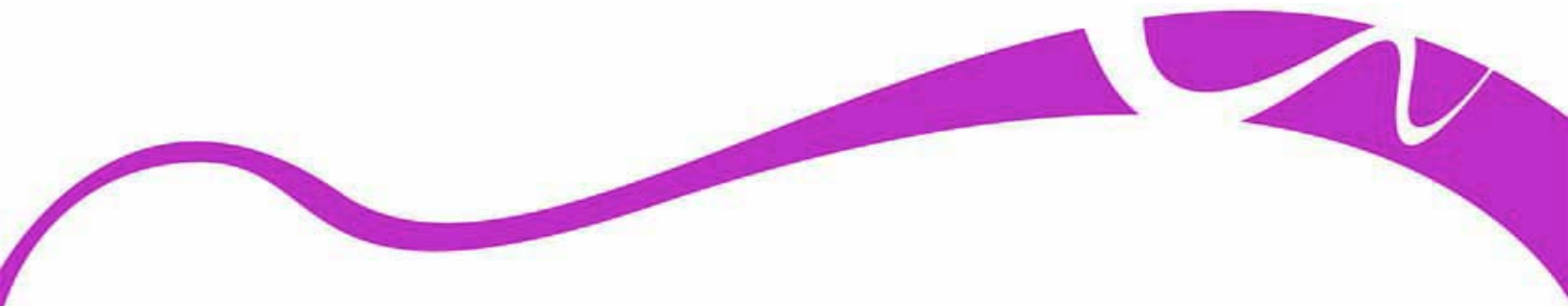
“It’s important that people are aware of the right services for their needs this winter, and remember that NHS direct, pharmacies and walk-in centres can all offer advice and treatment. If you think you have flu, don’t go to A&E or your GP. Contact the National Pandemic Flu Service, which can advise on symptoms and how to collect antivirals. Only phone your GP directly if:

- you have a serious existing illness that weakens your immune system, such as cancer,
- you are pregnant,
- you have a sick child under one,
- your condition suddenly gets much worse, or
- your condition is still getting worse after seven days (five for a child).”

In addition to ensuring they use the right service, people in West Kent can help to reduce pressure this winter by following these top tips:

- **Be prepared.** Make sure your medicine cabinet is stocked up with Paracetamol or aspirin, Anti-diarrhoeal medicine, Rehydration mixture, Indigestion mixture, Plasters, Thermometer.
- **Wash your hands.** Catch sneezes in a tissue and practice good hygiene at all times
- **Stop smoking.** Stopping smoking will boost your health for the winter, reduce your chances of a heart attack and improve your body’s circulation.
- **Eat well.** Food is a vital source of warmth, so try to have regular hot meals and drinks throughout the day.
- **Dress well.** Wear plenty of layers and put on a good coat, hat, scarf and gloves when you go outside to help keep warm.
- **Heat well.** Try to keep a temperature of 21°C in the main rooms used during the day. Use a hot water bottle or electric blanket (not both for safety reasons) if a bedroom is cold at night
- **Get financial support.** There are grants, benefits and sources of advice available to make homes more energy efficient, improve your heating or help with bills.

Key statistics on Swine Flu



- The West Kent GP consultation rate has dropped slightly to 64 per 100,000 population (for the week ending October 25) from 65.1 per 100,000 population the previous week.
- As of 28 October, 762 people have been admitted to hospital in connection with swine flu across the south east coast region. As of 24 September, 559 people had been admitted to hospital in connection with Swine Flu across the South East Coast region.
- There have been no deaths related to Swine Flu in the West Kent region. Nationally, there have been 97 confirmed deaths. (This figure represents the number of deaths in individuals with Swine Flu but does not represent the number of deaths that can be attributed solely to Swine Flu.)

External links

A guide for families to keep warm and well this winter is available at http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_105380.pdf

A weekly report, case numbers and statistics, which describes the progress of the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza epidemic in the UK, is available on the Health Protection Agency (HPA) website at: <http://www.hpa.org.uk/>

The National Pandemic Flu Service website can be accessed at www.direct.gov.uk/pandemicflu. People can also call 0800 1 513 100 or 0800 1 513 200 (Textphone) to check their symptoms.

Further information on the vaccination recommendation announcement can be found at <http://www.emea.europa.eu/influenza/newsroom/newsroom.html>

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For further media information call Emma Smyth on 01732 375270 or email emma.smyth@wkpct.nhs.uk

About NHS West Kent

West Kent Primary Care Trust is now known as NHS West Kent in recognition of its role as leader of the local NHS. Its roles and responsibilities remain the same – to plan and commission healthcare that meets local people's needs within the overall budget and rigorously monitor the quality of that care, and to work with partners to improve local people's health.

