

19 December 2019

Walk-in Centre to scale back services ahead of full withdrawal

Healthcare in Swindon is set to change from next year when the town's Walk-in Centre is taken out of service.

Based within the larger Swindon NHS Health Centre in Islington Street, the Walk-in Centre will begin scaling back its services over the coming months, before being withdrawn on Wednesday 1 April.

Patients attending the Walk-in Centre for minor injuries and illness throughout the Christmas and New Year period, as well as before the end of March, will still be seen, however people will be encouraged to use alternative services, such as their GP practice, local pharmacist or calling NHS 111, when seeking help in the future.

The move, which mirrors what is happening in other towns and cities, comes after NHS England and NHS Improvement directed CCGs to consolidate on-the-day healthcare services ahead of a nationwide rollout of Urgent Treatment Centres.

In addition, a recent audit of the Walk-in Centre showed the majority of people attending were doing so for services that are available, as well as more effective when provided, at GP practices.

Data from the audit, which took place during July and August, also revealed a large proportion of attendances came from people registered with the two GP practices based within the Swindon NHS Health Centre, as well as people wanting blood tests, wound care and other services available from GP practices.

Gill May, Director of Nursing and Quality, said: "These changes, which follow national directives, will help us ensure people receive the care they need in the most appropriate environment.

"We know people use the Walk-in Centre as a way of not having to wait for a GP appointment, but we also know that care is always more effective when given by somebody already familiar with a person's medical history.

"Over the last five years, we have invested heavily in primary care across Swindon to enable practices to do more for patients, such as plan in more evening and weekend appointments, and we hope this will make it easier for people to be seen by the right healthcare professional at their GP practice."

Attendances at the Walk-in Centre will continue to be monitored over the coming months, with the data trends being used to help shape future healthcare.

The CCG has also commissioned a number of interim services to help patients continue accessing the care and treatment they need during the transition process.

A dedicated phlebotomy clinic has been set up within the Swindon NHS Health Centre, and is currently seeing people needing urgent blood tests on a drop-in basis every weekday between 8am and 12.30pm.

Healthcare for homeless people, many of whom use the Walk-in Centre as an alternative to registering with a GP practice, will continue to be available in the town centre as both GP practices based in the Swindon NHS Health Centre, along with 10 others across Swindon, are taking on patients with no fixed address.

In addition, people living with a drug addiction will still be able to exchange needles in the Swindon NHS Health Centre by visiting the pharmacy on the ground floor.

Plans are also under way for a dedicated wound care clinic, providing services such as redressing and packing open wounds, as well as removing stitches, to be established.

Gill May said: "Swindon is rich with places to go for quick healthcare, with the most effective option often being the local pharmacy, which can provide help for minor health conditions and even write repeat prescriptions.

"There are more than 40 pharmacies in Swindon, which means a person is never more than a few minutes away from their nearest point of instant care and treatment.

"For more pressing health concerns, people should phone NHS 111, which is much more than just a hotline for advice, as the trained call handlers can signpost patients to the most appropriate service and even book out-of-hours GP appointments.

"People also have the option of visiting the Urgent Care Centre at the Great Western Hospital for care and treatment for conditions that need urgent medical attention but are not life threatening."

The withdrawal of the Walk-in Centre will not affect any of the other services located in the Swindon NHS Health Centre, such as the pharmacy, GP practices and sexual health clinic, neither will it result in any job losses.