

**Hampshire Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee
Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust update
11 January 2020**

Trust response to COVID-19

1. Introduction

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic remains an absolute priority for Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust (PHU). As of 31 December 2020, the whole of Hampshire along with many other parts of the country, is under the tightest, tier four restrictions, following a significant rise in COVID-19 cases and the rapid spread of two new variants of the virus in the community.

According to the Office for National Statistics, prevalence of COVID-19 in Portsmouth has risen to significantly above the national average at 442 cases per 100,000 compared to 275 per 100,000 across England. We are currently treating 323 patients with a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 at Queen Alexandra Hospital (QA) in Cosham.

We are working closely with our local health and care partners and have taken action to ensure that we are as prepared as possible for the days and weeks ahead as we care for an increasing number of patients with COVID-19, many of whom require high levels of care, and respond to winter pressures.

Regular Gold Command meetings, chaired by our Chief Executive, and Silver meetings, chaired by our Chief Operating Officer, are ongoing. We have stepped up our command structure further in light of the increase in prevalence of COVID-19 cases locally and also have a co-located team which is complementing our operational centre function as we continue to follow all national guidance, closely monitor and respond to emerging evidence about the virus, prevalence and impact.

The safety of our patients, visitors and colleagues remains our priority and we continue to work closely with our partners across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to respond to the pandemic and challenges across the local health and care system.

We all have a role to play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Our Chief Executive recently wrote an [open letter](#) to thank our communities for their continued support and further emphasise the importance of us all continuing to follow national guidance, wear a face mask or covering as required, wash hands regularly and practice social distancing.

2. NHS vaccination programme

We were delighted to be confirmed as one of the very first “Hospital Hubs” for delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine, along with 49 other locations across the country, enabling the Trust to play an important role in the largest immunisation programme in history.

This followed the Government’s acceptance of the recommendation from the independent Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Authority (MHRA) to approve the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for use after it met strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

Following publication by the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI), of national guidance for priority groups to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, the immunisation programme launched on 8 December.

PHU is proud to have been among the first in the world to administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

Delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine is complex as it must be stored at -70C and moved carefully before being administered. The vaccine is administered in two separate doses.

Teams and individuals across the Trust worked tirelessly to ensure that we were fully prepared to receive and handle the vaccine, create an appropriate clinical space on the hospital site and ensure that appropriate resources and workplace vaccinators were in place to support delivery, and continue to do so as the programme is rolled out.

On 30 December the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine became the second vaccine to be approved for use in the UK following clinical trials and analysis of the data by the MHRA, which recommended that the vaccine was approved for use. We await further guidance on the roll-out of this vaccine.

3. Asymptomatic testing for COVID-19

In November we commenced twice weekly asymptomatic testing for COVID-19 for individuals working in patient-facing roles across the organisation. This followed confirmation from NHS England and NHS Improvement that the test would be rolled out to patient-facing staff across the NHS after a pilot with 34 Trusts.

To date, more than 8,000 test kits have been distributed to colleagues in patient-facing roles across the Trust and we continue to encourage all patient-facing staff to test themselves twice a week using the lateral flow testing devices.

This is a significant development in helping to keep patients and staff safe while further reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

ENDS