

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

Trust response to COVID-19

Introduction

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic remains an absolute priority for Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust (PHU). Portsmouth, Havant and Gosport were moved into the tightest government restrictions, tier four, from 20 December 2020 and following this, the rest of Hampshire along with the whole of England, were also moved into tier four, on 26 December essentially moving everyone into a national lockdown. The decision to do this was made following a significant rise in COVID-19 cases.

According to the Office for National Statistics, prevalence of COVID-19 in Portsmouth remains above the national average at 148 cases per 100,000 compared to 125 per 100,000 across England. We are currently treating 251 patients with a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 at Queen Alexandra Hospital (QA) in Cosham. This is a reduction of over 280 patients from the last peak in this most recent wave when we had 539 patients with a positive diagnosis of COVID-19. While the rate of infection is moving in the right direction, the number of patients requiring intensive treatment in our Critical Care Unit remains high and our current inpatient numbers remain higher than wave one where we peaked on 8 April 2021 with 168 patients.

We continue to work closely with our local health and care partners to support each other in caring for the high number of patients with COVID-19 we have seen, as well as with usual winter pressures. A significant proportion of patients with COVID-19 who have required admission at Queen Alexandra Hospital have needed higher levels of care than previously seen and we have continued to follow plans to provide additional intensive care space in other areas of the hospital. This has meant a reduction in our elective and planned care.

Regular Gold Command meetings, chaired by our Chief Executive, and Silver meetings, chaired by our Chief Operating Officer, are ongoing. We continue to follow all national guidance, while closely monitoring and responding to emerging evidence about the virus, prevalence and impact including the new variants. This includes sharing information regularly with staff around infection prevention and prevalence.

With the slow reduction in prevalence locally we are as a Trust and as part of the wider healthcare system considering the most suitable and effective way, we can gradually reintroduce services which had been paused due to the demands of the pandemic. We know that many of our staff have been redeployed to elsewhere in the organisation to support the care of our sickest patients and have been working under increased pressure for some time. Any restoration plans must take into account that some of these staff will still be needed in their temporary bases and unable to return

immediately to their usual roles, as well as needing time to rest and recover themselves.

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 challenges we face not only due to the pandemic, but wider health and system care pressures. Following on from guidance around the support of staff during this period of prolonged pressure, we have stepped up the health and wellbeing services including mental health support available to them.

We do not underestimate the role we have to play in encouraging compliance with national guidance and setting an example to support a reduction in the transmission of COVID-19. We have hosted numerous media outlets over the last few months sharing information about the position the Trust is in as well as the pressure our teams and individuals face. This has been well received and we continue working with media organisations to support accurate, timely updates.

NHS vaccination programme

In December 2020 PHU were confirmed as one of the very first “Hospital Hubs” for delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine, along with 49 other locations across the country. PHU remain incredibly proud of the role we continue to play in supporting the largest immunisation programme in NHS history.

We began vaccinating priority groups, as set out by the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI), with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Earlier this year we also received a limited supply of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which has been used with patients unable to have the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine due to contraindications.

In February we completed the task of offering all PHU staff their first dose of vaccine and are working with colleagues who have declined to offer support and advice that we hope will encourage uptake. We have also during the past few months offered vaccination appointments to neighbouring Trusts and other social and health providers locally. To support with the roll out, we have been working closely with health and social care partners to support communications and engagement around encouraging high-risk groups that we know have expressed hesitancy around getting the vaccine.

Following a change of national guidance, we increased the gap between first and second doses from 21 days up to 12 weeks. This has enabled a higher number of people to have their first dose more quickly. We will shortly commence delivering second doses to individuals.

Asymptomatic testing for COVID-19

In November 2020 we started distributing twice weekly asymptomatic testing kits for all individuals working in patient facing roles across the Trust. Over 8,000 test kits were distributed at the time and we continue working with staff to remind them

around the importance of carrying out these tests and reporting them each time. These kits help identify when a member of staff may be carrying the virus but not showing symptoms and helps us reduce the risk of them unknowingly passing this onto our patients and staff. These tests are an important part of the work we are doing to protect our patients and staff against the transmission of this virus, and compliance with at-home testing kits means we are playing an essential role in this.

Many staff who were part of the first roll-out are now reaching the end of their kits and we have begun distributing replacements to them, as well as to every member of staff in the Trust including Engie, Bank Partners, military staff, students and trainees.