

For immediate release
Friday, December 17, 2010

Number 134

Choose the right service this winter

RESIDENTS across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland are being asked to take note of GP opening times to avoid unscheduled visits to A&E this Christmas.

Patients are being urged to check their GP and pharmacy opening times should people feel unwell or need advice on headaches, flu-like symptoms, vomiting and severe tummy pain.

With many GP surgeries preparing for a four-day holiday shutdown, the advice is to take a few simple steps to avoid the risk of unnecessary visits to A&E or long waits to see a doctor out of hours:

- Keep a note of the NHS Direct number by your phone for timely advice – 0845 4647
- Your GP should be the first port of call. If they are unavailable, use the out of hours service. The details of this should be on the surgery's answer phone message.
- Check your GP's Christmas opening hours by calling the customer services teams
- Act now to get a repeat prescription only if your regular medication is likely to run out over the Christmas bank holiday weekend
- Ensure your medicine cabinet is well stocked with basic medicines including cold and flu remedies, which should be stored securely
- Check your local pharmacy details and opening hours using the NHS text service. Simply text 'pharmacy' to 64746 and receive three free texts with details of your nearest pharmacy

Traditionally at this time of year many people wrongly visit A&E when they could get quicker, more appropriate treatment elsewhere.

Mark Williams, consultant in the emergency department at Leicester's Hospitals, said: "I would like to encourage people to think before visiting the emergency department this Christmas and contact their GP for an appointment if their illness is not an emergency. There are a number of alternative places for you to seek appropriate treatment such as NHS Direct, an NHS walk in centre, the urgent care centre, which is based at the Royal Infirmary, your GP or a local pharmacy."

Dr Chris Trzcinski, a GP and chairman of NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland's professional executive committee, said: "It is really important that everyone knows the best place to go for medical care when they need it, which will help to avoid unnecessary pressure on life-saving services such as A&E this winter.

"Find out when your GP surgery is open and if it offers extended opening hours. You can also get treatment at walk-in centres or minor injury units. Should you need a GP out of hours, call the surgery as normal and there will be a message telling you how to contact the out-of-hours service. If you are not registered with a GP practice, or cannot get through, call 0845 045 0411."

Dr Aly Rashid, speaking on behalf of NHS Leicester City, said: "We understand people fall poorly with a range of illnesses this time of year and we are here to help. If you experience prolonged tummy pain, ear and head pain or vomiting make an appointment to see your GP. If the illness occurs out of surgery hours please use the contact number provided on the surgery's answer phone message."

Residents are also reminded to keep a well stocked medicine cabinet, which is kept safely away from children, in the event that they can't get to a pharmacy during the bank holidays. This should include paracetamol, plasters, rehydration and diarrhoea treatment, antiseptic cream, a thermometer and cold and flu remedies.

Patients will continue to be able to access services at walk-in centres and minor injury units across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland during the holiday period at:

- Oadby and Wigston Walk-In Medical Centre (8am-8pm, 365 days a year)
- Loughborough Walk-In Centre, Pinfold Gate, Loughborough (24 hours, 365 days a year)

- Lutterworth Minor Injury Unit, Fielding Palmer Hospital (9am-9pm, 365 days a year)
- Market Harborough Minor Injury and Illness Unit, Market Harborough and District Hospital (9am-9pm, 365 days a year)
- Melton Mowbray Minor Injury and Illness Unit, Melton Mowbray Hospital, (weekends and bank holidays 9.30am-1.30pm from 20 December)
- Rutland Minor Injury and Illness Unit, Rutland Memorial Hospital from 20 December 9am-5pm weekdays. Urgent care is available 9am-9pm weekends and bank holidays. Please call the out of hours service first on 0845 045 0411 for appropriate advice.
- The Merlyn Vaz Health and Social Care Centre (8am-8pm, 365 days a year)
- Leicester Royal Infirmary Urgent Care Centre (24 hours, 365 days a year)

In addition SSAFA walk-in service at the Merlyn Vaz Health Centre will be available to all city patients from 8am to 8pm everyday throughout the holiday period.

For more information visit www.leicestercity.nhs.uk or call NHS Leicester City's customer services team to find your nearest pharmacist on 0116 295 7011. To find your nearest pharmacy or walk-in centre in the county visit NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland's website at www.lcr.nhs.uk and click on the green Find Services button.

ENDS

For interviews or more information please contact city media officer Liz Thomas on 0116 295 4123 or liz.thomas@leicestercity.nhs.uk. Or contact NHS Leicester County and Rutland's press officer Caroline Higgs on 0116 295 7663 or caroline.higgs@lcr.nhs.uk.

Notes to editor:

NHS Leicester City is the operating name for Leicester Primary Care Trust.

NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland is the operating name for Leicestershire County and Rutland Primary Care Trust (PCT).

- Approximately one out of every four people who go to A&E could have been treated elsewhere in the community, or could have self-treated
- Over 16,000 people attended A&E and were discharged without needing further treatment last year, costing the NHS over £1m.
- 154,577 people from Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland went to their local A&E department last year, at a cost of over £12m.
- Approximately 23 per cent of people who go to A&E could have been treated elsewhere in the community.
- The Leicestershire County and Rutland Out of Hours Service provides urgent advice and medical care to Leicestershire and Rutland patients when their GP

practice is closed. Between 15 November and 6 December the service has seen a 62% rise in calls and the top reason for calling is cold and flu-like symptoms which most people can treat at home with over the counter remedies