**Re: Update on the COVID-19 booster programme and impact upon your GP services**

Dear Patient

You will have seen that the highest priority for the NHS is to offer booster Covid jabs to everyone over 18. For the past 20 months the whole team at Dove Valley Practice have been working extremely hard in the most difficult circumstances to make a contribution to the 110 million COVID-19 vaccinations delivered to date whilst continuing to deliver care to all patients, protect the most vulnerable patients and assist hospitals and the wider NHS services as all recovered from the devastating impact caused by the first waves of COVID-19.

Dove Valley Practice, along with GP colleagues around the country, are once again being asked to step to the forefront to deliver a record number (20 million) COVID vaccinations before the end of the year. This is a huge challenge for a team that is already exhausted and is being hit by the same illness and COVID impact as the rest of the nation. It will require everyone to work even harder and longer than they do now.

We appreciate the concerns you may have and that you want to understand how the government statement that routine services may need to be stood down to allow us to focus on providing COVID vaccinations may impact on you and your care.

Firstly, we once again request your kindness, respect and understanding for the team working incredibly hard within our practice to help as many people as possible. In terms of any planned appointments you have booked with us, there are no changes at the current time. If you do have any COVID symptoms or have been in contact with a person who has tested COVID positive, please do contact the practice before you attend and have a PCR test. Otherwise, please bring your face covering and attend your appointment as normal. If we need to make any changes, we will contact you directly. If you are unable to attend, it is important to ensure you cancel your appointment so we can provide the time to the many others who need to see us.

Secondly, our practice is open, and it is important that you continue to put your health first and seek urgent medical help when you need it. You may find that our phonelines are overwhelmed by the volume of calls we are receiving and it is more difficult than usual to reach us so we kindly ask you to only ring the surgery when it is essential. That way we can respond to our patients with the highest need. We have tried our utmost to continue to care for you and your loved ones through challenging circumstances, but winter has always seen a lot more illness and higher demand for services. COVID has made it even harder and the new booster campaign makes it impossible for us to maintain normal services.

We do understand that this may be worrying for you and we will do our very best to meet our patient needs but there may be times, in the extreme circumstances we are now in, that we must prioritise those in greatest need. It may feel that our team is asking a lot of questions when you contact the practice but that is to help us help you so please be patient. Understanding the need and urgency will help us get you to the best person first time, that person may not always be a GP.

If you need routine care and your condition is stable, we may need to be delay check-ups for a while, but if you do feel your condition has worsened and is causing you great concern please do contact the practice.

Many calls we get are for minor illnesses which are self limiting and do not need clinical intervention. Before contacting the practice, please do consider self help and pharmacy options, these may well be much quicker to give you with the help you need.

We are also being inundated with COVID vaccination related calls. Please do not contact the practice to request a COVID vaccination appointment or a COVID Pass letter unless asked to do so. This prevents patients in need of urgent medical help being able to reach the practice and is not something our reception team can assist with. You will be invited when we have a vaccination appointment available for you or you can book via the national booking system and all COVID Pass letters/codes can be generated online or via the NHS App.

Prevention is better than cure and we really need our patients, carers and practice team to help each other as we get through this challenges that face us over the weeks and months ahead. We pledge to continue to do our very best for you and we know that you will want to do all you can to help us all get through this next phase in the pandemic.

Please do explore the information/links below prior to contacting us but if you do find yourself still needing help, we continue to be here for you and will do all we can.

Thank you again for your understanding, consideration and kindness; it truly is appreciated by the whole team

Dove Valley Practice

Points to consider and helpful links:

Self help –

* The NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/>
* 111 online: <https://111.nhs.uk/>
* Mental health support: <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/your-mind-plan-quiz/>
* Mental health tips: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/>

Pharmacy -

* Find a pharmacy: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy>
* How a pharmacy can help you: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/prescriptions-and-pharmacies/pharmacies/>

Econsult – Please see details of the *Doctorlink e-consultation system* on our website

Telephones – The telephone lines are generally less busy between 11am and 3pm

COVID -

* NHS website for general queries guidance and support: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
* NHS COVID Vaccination programme: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
* COVID Pass Letters: <https://www.nhs.uk/contact-us/covid-status-letter-service-help/>
* COVID vaccination National booking service: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/> or by calling NHS 119, to get an appointment in a designated local community pharmacy or vaccination centre.