

# healthwatch County Durham

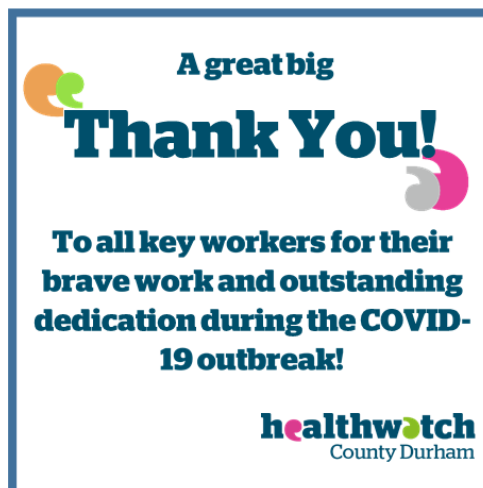
News update - May 2020

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## Send us your 'Thank You'

Now more than ever, we would like to celebrate the tremendous efforts that are occurring within your community. Send us your 'Thank You!' messages for the brave individuals and brilliant organisations within County Durham who are working tirelessly to help others during the COVID-19 outbreak. We will share your messages of thanks on our social media channels and in our newsletters to show your appreciation for all the heroic work going on in the county, and to help spread some positivity during this challenging time!

Contact us with your messages and stories by calling us on 0800 3047039 or email us at [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net)



## We're Still Here For You!

Due to the governments advice regarding the COVID-19 pandemic we have currently changed the way we work. Trying to delay the spread of the virus, as well as supporting the NHS, local communities and individuals where we can is our top priority at this difficult time. Our team are now all working from home, and all of our public engagement events have been postponed until further notice, including our Enter and View visits. We would like to apologise to anyone who may have had a session planned with us and hope you understand this decision given the need to limit unnecessary risk to the public.

However, we want to assure you that **Healthwatch County Durham is still here for you** to listen, speak up and advise. You can still share your experiences of health and social care services with us via the ['contact us'](#) page on our website, or by contacting us on our free phone number: **0800 3047039** or mobile **07756 654218**.

Our aim as a local Healthwatch remains to equip people with relevant information about how and where to get support they need. However, we cannot provide any clinical advice, including advice on symptoms of COVID-19, managing medications, or whether to self-isolate. We would advise you to look at the [NHS 111 website](#) for clinical advice.

We also want to help isolated individuals receive useful public health information as local and national messages are continually being updated. If you are worried about anyone who might not be getting the information they need, please [get in touch](#).

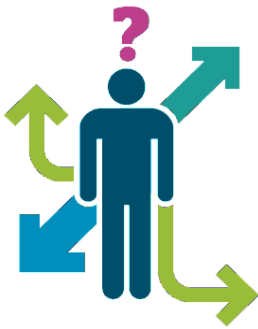
As new information emerges, we will try to keep you as informed as possible. The situation is continually changing, so it is important to remain community-minded, only listen to official advice and keep yourself and others safe.

**We hope to see you soon!**



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## Spotlight On Signposting



We received a call from a lady who had issues with a cracked tooth and was aware that her own dental practice was closed. This lady did not have access to a car and limited access to the internet. She did not want to call NHS 111 as she felt that they were busy with Covid-19 patients. With the lady's permission we went through the [NHS 111 online support](#) together for medical help.

NHS 111 gave advice on alternative options that she could purchase from her local pharmacy. It also gave her contact details of 2 dentists which were open- unfortunately they were too far for her to access. After making a follow up call to the lady, she advised that she had called NHS 111 for some advice which put her mind at rest.

If you or your clients would like help and support in accessing the NHS 111 online support, please give us a call on **0800 3047039**.

## Farming Through The Pandemic

Some believe that the health of the nation is in farming's hands, not simply thanks to the nourishment that comes from quality food, but in terms of the emotional well-being that can come from being on the land.

One of the Healthwatch County Durham volunteers is testament to this. Paul Stokes, who has been volunteering with us for four years regularly visits a smallholding near where he lives in Tow Law. Although Paul struggles sometimes with his own health, he suggests that “this won't stop me exercising in the fresh air with the calves, and the pain seems to go away when I am up the smallholding. The calves still need the work even if there is no shows this year, hopefully there might be some sales. They will get some intensive training after they are weaned”.

Paul's experiences backs up Gregor Henderson's (National Lead for Wellbeing and Mental Health with Public Health England) view that “if every household in Britain was given access to green space it would save £2.1bn in health costs. Farming is a major influence in the health of the nation, beyond simply delivering good food. Farming is a dynamic process that through its activities and interactions with the environment gives people a sense of purpose and well-being,” he adds.



## A reminder that the NHS is still 'Open'

Health officials in County Durham would like to remind individuals that the NHS is still very much 'open for business' and here for you if you become unwell, despite the mounting pressures that health services are currently facing. This comes after concerns that people are reluctant to seek medical help for illnesses unrelated to the coronavirus.

Dr Neil O'Brien, accountable officer with NHS County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) said: "Coronavirus is having a huge effect across the whole country but it has not taken away other health care needs and people should not ignore symptoms and hope they will go away or put off essential care such as childhood immunisations. The quicker people seek help the better their outcome is likely to be. It might not exactly be 'business as usual', but it is extremely important that people continue to seek treatment for their ongoing health care needs."

The [NHS 111 service](#), GP services, pharmacies and emergency departments are still available for patients, as strict infection control measures are now in place.

If you need to see a GP please call before visiting, as practices have now introduced initial telephone 'triage' assessments to enable them to prioritise appointments for those most in need and allow health professionals to provide the most appropriate treatment in the most appropriate place. In some cases doctors are using telephone and video consultation appointments to ensure that continued care is provided to patients in the safest way.

Repeat prescriptions can be requested online, or by using the NHS App. People who do not have internet access should contact their surgery, who will advise them how to order their medication.

**Patients should still continue to dial 999 in the event of a life threatening emergency.**

Please [see here](#) for the latest information from the NHS



## Support in County Durham: Coronavirus

The coronavirus outbreak is making life very difficult for many people and it can be difficult to access the basics. Many of you will be getting help and support from friends, relatives or local groups. Durham County Council have set up a community hub for those who need further support. Through #CountyDurhamTogether they are ensuring you get the help you need, either through established networks or through the council directly.

You can find a list of local support groups and organisations that provide assistance on the council's '[Locate](#)' website- just click on the coronavirus section which will guide you to the help you need.

### Still need help?

If you don't have anyone to pick up medication, please contact your community pharmacy. If you are unable to access support for help with essentials such as food supplies, or someone who can listen and support you, please contact the council directly:

Email: [communityhub@durham.gov.uk](mailto:communityhub@durham.gov.uk)

Call: **03000 260 260** to be connected to the help you need

Or: Fill in their Covid -19 Help form [here](#)

To keep up to date with their latest coronavirus information and advice visit the [Durham County Council website](#)

#CountyDurhamTogether



## NHS Volunteer Responders are ready to help!

If you are self-isolating and are in need of some support, the NHS volunteer responders are ready to help you. *Please note that you should only get in touch if you fall into the following categories:*

- People aged 70 years and older with underlying health conditions
- If you are in the 'extremely vulnerable' to COVID 19 group and have been sent a letter asking you to shield from the virus
- People who are pregnant
- If you are newly socially vulnerable as a result of COVID 19
- People who have a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010
- Others with high-risk conditions could include:
  - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
  - People with serious heart conditions
  - People who are immunocompromised including because of cancer treatment
  - People of any age with severe obesity e.g. body mass index (BMI) over 40
  - Certain underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, such as those with diabetes, dementia, renal failure, or liver disease might also be at risk

You can call Healthwatch County Durham on **0800 3047039** and we can refer you to the service. Alternatively, you can self-refer by calling **0808 196 3646**.

For further information please visit the [Royal Voluntary Service website](#)



## Routine Ambulance Transport Redeployed



Almost all patient transport services to hospital appointments have now been redeployed by the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) until further notice to help support COVID-19 services:

- Routine journeys to non-essential clinics have been suspended
- There are now fewer patients with life-threatening conditions on vehicles to maintain social distancing
- Increased hospital discharges to free inpatient and critical care capacity for COVID-19 patients

A limited transport service is continuing for patients needing dialysis; chemotherapy, radiotherapy and other cancer treatment; and when required for non-urgent assessment as directed by a clinician.

For those patients showing symptoms of COVID-19, vehicles will only transport one patient at a time. Crews in direct contact will also be wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), although the designated driver will not be required to wear PPE whilst driving.

Patients who have any concerns their transport should ring NEAS patient transport on **0300 111 0247**.

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# Looking after your Mental Health



Looking after your mental health during a global pandemic can be extremely challenging. Take a look at the NHS's top 5 tips on how to help promote your wellbeing during this time:

1. **Talk about your worries:** it is normal to feel worried, scared or helpless about the current situation. Maintain contact with friends and family via phone and video calls to share how you are feeling.
2. **Keep a regular routine and set goals:** you may need to set a new routine for now. Maintaining good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how you feel mentally and physically too, so it's important to get enough.
3. **Manage your media and information intake:** if 24-hour news and constant social media updates are making you worried, try to limit the time you spend watching, reading or listening to coverage of the outbreak to once or twice a day.
4. **Do things you enjoy and try something new:** focusing on your favourite hobby, learning something new or simply taking time to relax indoors should give you some relief from anxious thoughts and feelings and can help boost your mood.
5. **Look after your body:** our physical health has a big impact on how we feel. At times like these it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour that end up making you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water and exercise regularly.

For more information and advice visit the [Every Mind Matters website](#)

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## Coronavirus: Domestic Abuse Helpline



The advice to stay home in order to tackle Coronavirus isn't the safest option for everyone. The government have set up a [support page](#) on how to get help if you or someone you know are a victim of domestic abuse. It is important to remember that there is help and support available to you, including police response, online support, helplines, refuges and other services. You are not alone.

**The household isolation instruction as a result of coronavirus does not apply if you need to leave your home to escape domestic abuse.**

Friends, family, neighbours and community members can be a vital lifeline to those living with domestic abuse. If you are worried that someone you know may be a victim of domestic abuse, reassure them that the police and support services are still there to help and direct them to sources of support.

Refuge runs the [National Domestic Abuse Helpline](#), which you can call for free, and in confidence, 24 hours a day on **0808 2000 247**. Its website provides guidance and

support for potential victims, as well as those who are worried about friends and loved ones. It also has a form through which you can book a safe time for a call from the team.

[Refuge's](#) website includes a range of resources on identifying the signs of domestic abuse, and a safety guide for women and children who are living with a perpetrator. It also features a tech abuse chat-bot with step-by-step instructional videos on how to secure devices such as phones and laptops. Look for the pink button in the bottom-right corner.

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## Get involved ...



### Survey for Parents and Caregivers of those with Special Needs

University College London would like to invite you to join them in a very time-sensitive, international research project aimed at finding out how individuals with special needs are coping with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and all its repercussions.

You can fill in the survey [here](#)



### Tell the NHS about your current experience of Coronavirus

This survey will help the NHS understand more about how and where coronavirus (COVID-19) is affecting people now. The NHS especially wants to hear from you if you have symptoms, no matter how mild. But it also helps if you let us know if you're feeling OK. You can fill in this survey for yourself or for someone else, like a child or an elderly relative. If the person is aged 13 and over,

check that they are happy for you to complete the survey for them.

You can complete the survey [here](#)



### Contact us:

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Email:

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