

Spotlight on Signposting

A client rang us with a query about the free NHS eye test that is available every two years to certain groups of people. It's recommended that most people should get their eyes tested every 2 years, and if you're eligible the NHS pays for it and you will not be charged. Just a few examples of those people who are eligible include:

- Those under 16
- Those who are 16, 17 or 18 and in full time education
- Those who are 60 or over
- Those who are registered as partially sighted or blind

Under certain circumstances it may be recommended that you have an eye test more frequently than every 2 years if you:

- Are a child wearing glasses
- Have diabetes
- Are aged 40 or over and have a family history of glaucoma
- Are aged 70 or over

If you want an eye test more often than your ophthalmic practitioner or optometrist considers clinically necessary, you will have to pay for a private test. Examples of when it might be considered 'clinically necessary' could include:

- Significant change in a prescription
- The development of cataracts
- The development of glaucoma
- A referral to an eye specialist



Charges for private sight tests vary, so it's advisable to shop around. In addition you may qualify for help with health costs. You can call the Help with Healthcosts helpline on **0300 330 1343** or join their [Facebook group](#).

However, if you experience eye pain before your next free eye test is due and are concerned you may have to pay for a test, please don't delay to speak to your optician or call your GP. For more information on eye tests you can visit the [NHS website](#)

Young Carers Action Day- March 16th 2021

Philippa May- Community Engagement Practitioner at '[Family Action: The Bridge Young Carers Service](#)' popped into the Healthwatch County Durham Volunteer monthly meeting in February to talk about work with Young Carers, in County Durham.

"Family Action transforms lives by providing practical, emotional and financial support to those who are experiencing poverty, disadvantage and social isolation across the country".

As part of the discussion, Philippa mentioned the 'Young Carers Action Day' which is happening on Tuesday 16th March 2021.

Young Carers Action Day (YCAD) is an annual event, organised by [Carers Trust](#). It has taken place over the last six years to raise awareness of young carers and the incredible contribution they make to their families and local communities.

For further information about YCAD, please see [here](#).

If you would like to access support from The Bridge Young Carers Service, please call them on **0191 383 2520** (Monday - Thursday 9am - 2.30pm), or email durhamyoungcarers@family-action.org.uk



Roadmap out of Lockdown: We must remain cautious

Following the government's announcement of a cautious approach to easing lockdown, local leaders have released an updated joint statement calling for more support:

*"Our immediate focus is to do everything we can to support our schools to fully reopen on Monday 8 March...Many of us have missed physical social contact so the opportunity to hold the hand of a loved one while visiting them in a care home or meet outdoors with one other person for a chat is a welcome step forward, with the prospect of wider meetings and outdoor sports resuming on Monday 29 March, but again **only if the conditions are right**. What today's announcement doesn't change for now is the need to **stay at home and only go out for essential reasons**, including staying local when exercising, maintaining social distancing at all times, wearing face coverings and continuing to regularly wash our hands. **We urge everyone to take up the vaccine when offered** and to those in the priority groups who may still not have had their first dose to come forward. There is growing evidence that the vaccines are highly effective in protecting our communities from Covid-19, having a significant impact on the risk of serious illness and reducing the risk of infection, giving us great reason to be optimistic."*

To read the full statement
from local authority leaders, please
see [here](#)

For the latest government coronavirus
guidance, please check their [website](#)



Vaccination for Health and Social Care Staff

Do you employ staff who provide health and social care services or are you a member of staff providing those services? If the answer to either of these questions is 'yes' then you/ your staff are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccination now in line with government guidance.

If you or your members of staff are yet to receive their first COVID-19 vaccination, please email AHSCOVIDCOMMISSIONING@durham.gov.uk

People with Learning Disabilities Prioritised for Vaccine

Covid vaccinations will be offered to all people on the GP Learning Disabilities Register "as soon as possible" - expanding the sixth priority group by 150,000 people. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommended the change to the government on Wednesday, 24th February 2021.

Those with severe learning disabilities are already included in priority group six, while adults with less severe conditions have not been prioritised until now. Care minister Helen Whately said: *"I have heard first-hand how tough this pandemic has been for people with learning disabilities and their families. We are determined those more at risk from Covid should be vaccinated as soon as possible."* She added the change will *"mean those who are at a higher risk from the virus can get the protection they need"*

Group six on the vaccine priority list are currently receiving their vaccines - which includes all individuals between ages 16-64 with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality. The expansion of group six will mean group seven, which includes all those over the age of 60 may have to wait a little longer for their vaccine.

For more information please see [here](#)

NHS response to frequently asked questions about the COVID-19 Vaccination



Is the vaccine safe?

All steps in the usual vaccine development process have been rigorously followed in the development of covid-19 vaccines - including three phases of clinical trials which are globally recognised as having the highest safety standards. They involved people from all walks of life including healthcare professionals. Researchers took no safety shortcuts and the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine was declared safe and effective by the UK's independent medicines and healthcare products regulatory agency (MHRA).

As the COVID-19's survival rate is so high, do I need a vaccine?

It's true that most people who get COVID-19 are able to recover. But it's also true that some people develop severe complications or, sadly, die. It may also cause long-term health problems that experts are still working to understand.

As I've already had COVID-19, why do I need to be vaccinated?

We don't yet know how long natural immunity to COVID-19 lasts. Right now, it seems that getting COVID-19 more than once is not common, but there are still many questions that remain unanswered. Experts say that, even if you've had COVID-19, it would still be appropriate for you to get the vaccine to make sure you're protected.

Can the Covid vaccine affect fertility?

The Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) have issued a joint statement to confirm there is no evidence to suggest that Covid-19 vaccines will affect fertility. You can read the statement [here](#). Dr. Edward Morris, president at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, said: *"We want to reassure women that there is no evidence to suggest that Covid-19 vaccines will affect fertility. Claims of any effect of Covid-19 vaccination on fertility are speculative and not supported by any data."*

Does the vaccine contain pork, eggs or alcohol?

No, the vaccine doesn't contain any of these. The Council for Mosques has followed international debates, consulted with GPs, health professionals, and held discussions with local community leaders and Islamic Scholars. They have concluded that the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine doesn't contain any animal fats or egg bi-products and therefore can be taken by Muslims. All ingredients of the vaccines are published in the healthcare information on the [MHRA's website](#).

Sign up to the National Vaccine Registry

It's important that clinical trials continue into several other COVID-19 vaccines. Different vaccines work in different ways and NHS researchers still need to collect vital information about which vaccines work best. They're looking for people from all backgrounds, communities and ages to help with this.



Find out how you can help this research by signing up to the National Vaccine Registry [here](#)

Know Your Limits

Lockdown has seen many of us drinking more alcohol than we usually would. Increased alcohol intake may give us a temporary release from feelings of stress and anxiety, however, the negative impacts on both physical and mental health are well documented and the Chief Medical Officers offer the following guidelines for both men and women:

- To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis
- If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it's best to spread your drinking evenly over three or more days. If you have one or two heavy drinking episodes a week, you increase your risk of **long-term illness and injury**
- The risk of developing a range of health problems (including **cancers of the mouth, throat and breast**) increases the more you drink on a regular basis
- If you wish to **cut down the amount you drink**, a good way to help achieve this is to have several **drink-free days** a week

Do you know your Limits?

KNOW YOUR UNITS

Find out what's in your drinks! Get the facts and advice on alcohol units and measures.



14 UNITS

There is no completely safe level of drinking, but sticking within the guidelines lowers your risk of harming your health. Men and women are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week.



3 DAYS

Spread your drinking over 3 days or more if you drink as much as 14 units a week.

GLASS OF RED, WHITE OR ROSE WINE (ABV 13%)

 Small 125ml 1.6 UNITS	 Standard 175ml 2.3 UNITS	 Large 250ml 3.3 UNITS
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BEER, LAGER AND CIDER

REGULAR (ABV 4%)	STRONG (ABV 5.2%)	EXTRA STRONG (ABV 8%)
 1.8 UNITS	 1.8 UNITS	 2.2 UNITS
 3 UNITS	 3.5 UNITS	 4.5 UNITS

750ML BOTTLE OF RED, WHITE OR ROSE WINE (ABV 13.5%)



10 UNITS PER BOTTLE

OTHER DRINKS

 25ML SINGLE SPIRIT AND MIXER (ABV 42%) 1 UNIT	 275ML BOTTLE OF PRE-MIXED DRINK (ABV 5.5%) 1.5 UNITS
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UNDERSTANDING ABV

Alcohol by volume (ABV) is a percentage measure of the amount of alcohol in your drink. You can find the ABV on the labels of cans and bottles, sometimes it will be written as "vol" or "alcohol volume". The higher the % the stronger the drink is.

TRY LOWER STRENGTH DRINKS

Cut down the alcohol by swapping strong beers or wines for ones with a lower strength (ABV in %). You'll find this information on the bottle.



MEDICAL WARNING

Get medical advice before you stop drinking if you have physical withdrawal symptoms (like shaking, sweating or feeling anxious until you have your first drink of the day). It can be dangerous to stop drinking too quickly without proper support.

Are you drinking too much?

Why not check your individual risk factor by using the Drink Aware [online assessment tool](#). Drink Aware also offers self-help and support, including a useful FREE [app](#) to help you track your alcohol consumption and spend over time, calculate units and calories, and set goals to help you moderate your drinking.

Where to get help?

In addition to your GP, below are some resources if you, or someone you know needs additional help or advice:

- NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support/>
- Drink Aware: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>
- Durham County Council: <https://www.durham.gov.uk/alcohol>
- County Durham Drug & Alcohol Recovery Services: <https://codurhamdrugalcoholrecovery.co.uk/>
- Humankind: <https://humankindcharity.org.uk/service/county-durham-drug-and-alcohol-recovery-service/>

Looking after your Mental Health

Having good mental health helps us relax more, achieve more and enjoy our lives more. [Every Mind Matters](#) offers expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing.

Get Your Mind Plan

Answer 5 quick questions to get your free plan with tips to help you deal with stress and anxiety, improve your sleep, boost your mood and feel more in control. Take the quiz [here](#).



Children's Mental Health

There are times when we all feel the strain. As parents and carers, there are ways we can support children and young people to give them the best chance to stay mentally healthy.

Some children and young people have enjoyed being off school, while others will have really struggled - with the coronavirus outbreak keeping them at home and away from friends. Others may be coming to terms with family problems, loss or changes to their living situation.

With nationwide and local restrictions being regularly reviewed, they may also have to deal with self-isolating because of an outbreak in school or another period of school closure, or have worries about getting or passing on the virus. It's still uncertain what further changes we all may face.

Feelings like these will gradually ease for most, but there are always steps you can take to support them emotionally and help them cope with problems they face.

There's support available if you feel you or they need it. Please click [here](#) to find out more

ManHealth

[ManHealth](#) is a Community Interest Company which is a non-profit organisation where all funds raised are reinvested in the community which in this case is to provide support and advice to Men who are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing. ManHealth are the only voluntary sector organisation using a proactive approach to address this.

Why Men?

Whilst men are diagnosed with depression and anxiety much less than women that's likely to be due to men not seeking the help and advice they need -in addition men are always more likely to self-medicate on drugs and alcohol.

75% of suicides in 2019 were men and it's the largest cause of death for men under 50

ManHealth are dedicated to enable:

- Men to be able to recognise, manage and control their illness
- Improve their relationships with family, friends and wider community
- Increased chance to return to work and an active healthy participant in the community and life

Support is given by men who have a lived experience of mental ill health via:

- **Peer support groups** - running across Durham and Darlington at various locations 5 nights a week 6-8pm.
- **Webchat & Connect** - Free and Confidential service enabling men to seek support away from a group setting - 7 nights a week 6-10pm.
- **Online Support Groups** - Free to attend weekly groups delivered by Zoom for those who are unable or not ready to attend the main groups. Learn more by emailing david@manhealth.org.uk

For more information about ManHealth please call them on 01388 320023
or email info@manhealth.org.uk



Carers (including unpaid) access to COVID19 Vaccine

Covid-19 vaccination advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published on 30th December 2020 now includes Carers, both paid and unpaid, on the vaccination priority list. The advice recommends that carers who are in receipt of Carer's Allowance or are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer contracted Covid-19 should be included in Priority 6 alongside people with underlying conditions.

You can find more information regarding the priority groups by clicking [here](#) to read the updated advice.

I provide unpaid care to a family member or friend what should I do?

If you are an unpaid Carer and would like to be added to your GP register you should let them know as soon as possible. Unless you do that, your GP will not know you provide unpaid care, and you are likely to miss out on the chance of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine earlier.

Durham County Carers Support have devised a simple form to make this a quick and easy thing to do. Carers do not need to be registered with Durham County Carers Support to be added to the GP Carers Register but by registering with them, you will be offered a wealth of information, advice, and support- contact them on **0300 005 1213**



What if I don't get Carers Allowance?

It does not matter if you receive Carers Allowance or not. If you are providing unpaid care to a family member or friend, you are an unpaid carer.

If your GP practice says you are not eligible to move to Category 6 of the COVID-19 vaccine schedule you should point out firmly that:

1. You are, under UK law (The Care Act 2015), an unpaid carer.
2. In addition, Government guidance sets out clearly in the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI): advice on priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination that Category 6 of the vaccine schedule; includes those who are in receipt of a carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill.
3. Insist that you are legally eligible to be included in Category 6 of the priorities schedule for COVID-19 vaccination

What does the government mean when it says ‘disabled person’?

To simplify things, if you are providing unpaid care and support to someone who would struggle to manage their daily lives without your support because of their health and social care needs then that person has a ‘disability’ and you are an unpaid Carer. Disability includes almost every health condition including substance misuse, mental health and long standing illnesses, physical disability, learning disabilities, sight loss, dementia, cancer, Parkinson’s etc.

Can I receive the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the person I care for?

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have stated in their guidance that there should be some flexibility in how the vaccine is distributed. This means, that whilst there is no definitive agreement that you can be vaccinated at the same time as the person you care for you should ask your GP if this is possible and you may get agreement to do this.

For further information and support, please call Durham County Carers Support on 0300 005 1213, email admin@dccarers.org or visit their [website](#)

Free PPE for Unpaid Carers

If you are an unpaid carer who does not live with the person you care for, then you can request free PPE to support your caring role. Whilst it is not mandatory for unpaid carers to wear PPE, more recent clinical advice suggests it may be beneficial for unpaid carers who do not live with the person they care for to wear PPE.

If you live in County Durham and you would like to access this free PPE or have any queries regarding this offer, please email PPERequests@durham.gov.uk and include the words ‘Unpaid Carer’ in the subject bar.

Once you have sent your email, the PPE Customer Service Team will then send you a simple form to capture your order details and your delivery address. The PPE Customer Service Team will aim to deliver PPE out to you within 5 working days and can provide enough PPE for a number of weeks.

Share your feedback with the CQC

Share your feedback on care by completing the Care Quality Commission (CQC) simple online form, to tell them about:

- an experience of care - it can be good or bad
- a concern about a service you work for



To access the form please see [here](#) (Please note this is different from making a formal complaint. To make a formal complaint, you must contact the service itself).
Call 999 if there's an immediate risk of harm or abuse.

The 'Changes' Programme has gone Virtual

Changes is delivered by Durham County Council's Adult Learning and Skills Service in partnership with County Durham County Carers Support to provide Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to the parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Changes aims to ensure that parents and carers who are supporting a young person moving from children to adults' services are well informed about opportunities and gain valuable links to support networks and useful resources across County Durham.

Changes programme information:

When: The Changes Programme starts on Tuesday 13th April 2021 and runs through to Tuesday 18th May 2021 (Every Tuesday from 10am-2pm).

Where: Changes will be delivered virtually by Durham County Council Adult Learning and Skills Service in partnership with Durham County Carers Support. In many respects, creating a successful virtual training strategy is an art, and various elements will be present in order to implement an informative and engaging experience for all.

Who: Parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities/difficulties are welcome.

What's included?

- Programme content delivered virtually covering a wide range of topics and themes.
- Valuable links to support networks and useful resources across the county.

Places are limited and are allocated on first come first served basis. Early applications are strongly advised. For further information/ to book a place please call 03000 266 115 or email alss@durham.gov.uk

East Durham Trust: Free Activities for Isolated Residents

East Durham Unites

Is Boredom creeping in? ...It's time to unite and get active!
Sign up for weekly activity packs that will keep your mind moving and your boredom at bay -delivered straight to your door for free! Activities include:

- Word games and poetry
- Arts and crafts
- Growing and Planning
- Community Choir

...and more!

Learn more about yourself and others with chances to connect with your community.

To request a registration form please email clare.dobson@eastdurhamtrust.org.uk or call 0191 5693511



East Durham Community Chorus

Sing in the spring with the East Durham community chorus! Join a bespoke online choir, on Wednesdays 1-2pm to lighten your lockdown and brighten the wintertime with music and song!

Learn new songs, make new friends, and gain confidence in a supportive and social online space led by Bethany Elan. No Experience is needed and resources are provided- all are welcome!

To register please email info@bethanyelen.co.uk

Short Break Offer for families of Children/ Young People with SEN or Learning Disabilities

Covid-19 has changed the way we are living our lives, and whilst we had hoped things may start getting back to 'normal' we are still in another period of lockdown. Durham County Council know that this is a difficult time for some people and want to help you to get the most out of the services that are available to you. Please see their [PDF newsletter](#) to access more information on:

- Online activities and support
 - The Local Offer
 - Parent / Carer online support
 - Short Breaks Solutions
 - An opportunity to share your views in a parent/carer survey
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Positive Opportunities for Women (POW)

[Pioneering Care Partnership](#) are delivering a course 'POW' , designed for women aged 13+ to help with confidence, resilience and to build positive mental health whilst making new friends. The course will run for eight weeks and is FREE of charge to anyone living in County Durham. It will be delivered via Zoom by Karen Hughes and will be for one hour per week commencing on Wednesday 0th March from 10.00am - 11.00am.

If you are interested, or know of anyone who may be, please contact courses@pcp.uk.net or call 01325 321234 to register.



No Smoking Day

Smoking is the single greatest preventable cause of death in the world today. There are more than one billion smokers worldwide- and it kills up to half of the people who smoke.

No matter how long you've smoked for, no matter how many cigarettes you smoke a day, your health will start to improve as soon as you quit. Some health benefits are immediate, some are longer-term, but what matters is that it's never too late.

Why not use 'No Smoking Day- 10th March' as an opportunity to start your quitting journey? The [Smokefree County Durham](#) service provides tailored support and help for anyone living or working in County Durham- did you know you are four times more likely to quit using a support service than trying to quit alone!

Contact Smokefree County Durham on 0800 772 0565 or or text DURHAM to 62277 (texts are free). For self-help tips from the NHS please see [here](#).



World Glaucoma Week

World glaucoma week (WGW) 2021 is taking place from 8th- 15th March. Glaucoma UK have a new page on their website all about [glaucoma self-care](#) and will be launching their Glaucoma podcast on their [Facebook](#) page. They are also hosting a programme of digital glaucoma support groups and other activities throughout WGW- click [here](#) to register for their events.

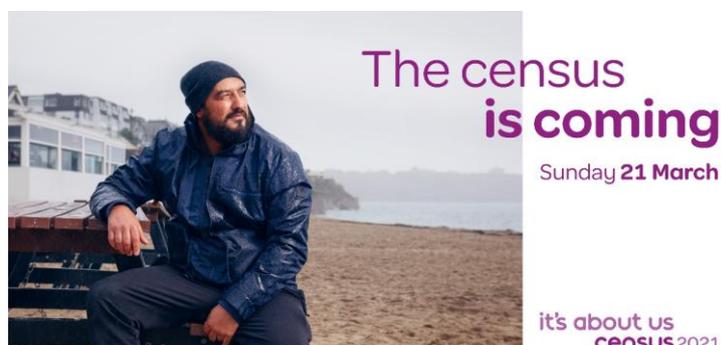
To keep up to date on all Glaucoma UK talks and services, keep an eye on their [website](#)!

Census 2021

The census is coming. By taking part, you can help to inform decisions on services that shape your community, such as schools, doctors' surgeries and bike lanes. It's important you fill in your census questionnaire because the information you share affects the life of every single person living in England and Wales. Because these things matter to us all, everyone needs to complete the census. Do not worry, your information is protected by law. That means government officials dealing with payments or services you receive cannot see it.

Census Day is Sunday 21 March. You can fill yours in online as soon as you get your access code in the post. If your household circumstances change on Census Day, you can let The Office for National Statistics (ONS) know.

If you need help, you can visit www.census.gov.uk where there's a wide range of support services available.





Contact us:

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Meadowfield Industrial Estate
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DH7 8XL

Freephone: 0800 3047039

Text: 07756 654218

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