

National Cancer weekly core messages

08/01/2021

Key messages

- Cancer services remain an absolute priority for the NHS. Thanks to the efforts of NHS staff, cancer services have been maintained throughout the pandemic.
- Over 1.2 million people were referred urgently between March and October and over 176,000 people started treatment for cancer, 95% within 31 days. In the lead up to Christmas, urgent referrals and treatments were at or above the level they were in the same period in 2019. That means we entered the most recent period of pressure in a strong position.
- The rapid rise in COVID-19 incidence and hospitalisation are creating pressures across NHS services, but NHS staff are working to ensure that, wherever possible, cancer treatment can continue safely. In local escalation plans, any decision to reschedule cancer treatment will be a last resort.
- On 30 November, Dame Cally Palmer (National Cancer Director) and Professor Peter Johnson (National Clinical Director for Cancer) wrote to NHS colleagues asking them to take steps to help ensure the continuity of services. These include:
 - re-establishing cancer hubs, where services are delivered in COVID-protected sites, with centralised triage in place to ensure people are prioritised based on clinical need;
 - drawing on the independent sector (IS) to increase capacity;
 - regular testing of NHS staff, including those who are non-symptomatic, and patients listed for surgery or attending chemotherapy and radiotherapy appointments;
 - ensuring that, where rescheduling cancer treatment is unavoidable, effective communications with patients and safety netting is in place, and that patients are being given dates for their rescheduled procedure at the earliest opportunity.
- The NHS is continuing to run its Help Us Help You campaign to encourage people with concerning symptoms to contact their GP.

Summary key message for patients:

“Cancer services remain an absolute priority for the NHS. The rapid rise in COVID-19 incidence and hospitalisation are creating pressures across NHS services, but staff are working to ensure that cancer diagnosis and treatment can continue safely. If your treatment is less urgent, it may be rescheduled, but it will go ahead as soon as it is possible and safe to do so. If you have

hospital appointments scheduled, please do help us to help you by continuing to attend these. If you have symptoms that you are worried may be cancer, please contact your GP immediately – you will get the tests you need, and if necessary, you will be treated. The NHS is here for you.”