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SAFE SURGERIES INITIATIVE: TOOLKIT FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

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8 steps to help make your GP practice
safe and accessible for everyone

Whilst all patients will experience a disruption in the way they access health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, a small number of patients facing exclusion, such as people experiencing homelessness, refugees, migrants, sex workers and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, are likely to experience particular difficulties getting healthcare and support. Based on the findings of our report, *An Unsafe Distance*, this toolkit is designed to help primary care staff support patients living in vulnerable circumstances realise their right to healthcare, get the most out of their General Practice, and access the information they need to keep safe in a COVID-19 context.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

GP practices can take concrete steps, both at reception and in consultations, to improve equity of access to their services.

- 1** Continue to register new patients during the pandemic
- 2** Do not insist on photo ID and proof of address at registration
- 3** Identify and reach out to people in vulnerable circumstances who are at high risk during the pandemic
- 4** Support patients to access their medication
- 5** Utilise ongoing interactions with vulnerable groups as an opportunity to conduct risk assessments for domestic violence and abuse
- 6** Keep patients registered
- 7** Prioritise face-to-face appointments for people living in vulnerable circumstances
- 8** Ensure guidance is available to excluded groups

1. CONTINUE TO REGISTER NEW PATIENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC



The NHS England guidance for patient registration says practices should continue to register new patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of a patient's ability to provide photo ID and proof of address. GP practices should review and adapt their registration processes to ensure new patients can register without visiting the practice in person or providing physical documents.

Make use of online registration systems as much as possible, but also consider options for people without access to the internet, such as assisted GP registration over the phone. Some patients with limited English will require the support of an interpreter, so check which translation service your practice uses and ensure everyone on reception is comfortable to dial for an interpreter during phone registration. Also, consider offering e-registration in the languages most commonly spoken within your patient group.

Many practices ask for a lot of information at the registration stage, which can result in complex and overwhelming registration forms. Rethink your practice registration form and just ask for the key information you need to get the patient registered.

2. DO NOT INSIST ON PHOTO ID AND PROOF OF ADDRESS AT REGISTRATION



There are many reasons why a patient may not be able to provide proof of their identity or address. NHS England guidance states that an inability to provide documents is not reasonable grounds to refuse a patient registration. During the pandemic, it is more important than ever that this doesn't present a barrier to healthcare for patients, or deter them from seeking primary care.

Asking patients to submit physical documentation may encourage unnecessary journeys whilst social distancing restrictions are in place. Electronic submission will be problematic for patients with limited access to the internet and/or scanning facilities.

3. IDENTIFY AND REACH OUT TO PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE CIRCUMSTANCES WHO ARE AT HIGH RISK DURING THE PANDEMIC



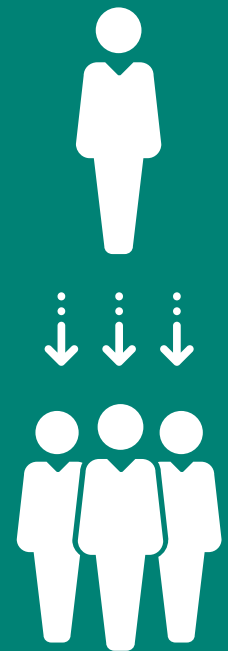
Use your patient list to identify people who are at clinically higher risk of COVID-19, check on their wellbeing and ensure they are aware and understand the current guidance for their situation. A variety of methods might be needed to ensure that this information reaches everyone that requires it. This might include face-to-face interactions, letters and telephone calls. Consider using a translator as well where needed.

4. SUPPORT PATIENTS TO ACCESS THEIR MEDICATION



Because of the pandemic some people have been moved from their usual address and source of healthcare, and may struggle to register with a new GP. Where possible, take a pragmatic approach to support patients who have recently moved out of the catchment area. If your practice can continue providing patients with their regular prescription this will avoid risking patient health, and prevent patients accessing A&E.

5. UTILISE ONGOING INTERACTIONS WITH VULNERABLE GROUPS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONDUCT RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE



For help on how to identify victims of abuse, please refer to the IRIS Project. For people without English as a first language, follow government guidance: Domestic abuse: get help during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

6. KEEP PATIENTS REGISTERED



Be mindful that during the COVID-19 crisis some people have had to move to or stay at a different address. Before de-registering patients, take proactive steps to contact them with information on how to register with a GP surgery close to their new address. Also, consider keeping them on your patient list for the duration of the pandemic.

7. PRIORITISE FACE-TO-FACE APPOINTMENTS FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN VULNERABLE CIRCUMSTANCES



Some people in vulnerable circumstances may benefit from face-to-face appointments, for example, those who require a translator, people with lower levels of literacy, people without access to a phone or without phone credit, people experiencing homelessness and those who are digitally excluded.

8. ENSURE GUIDANCE IS AVAILABLE TO EXCLUDED GROUPS



Some patients who do not speak English as a first language may struggle to access the information they need to keep safe during the pandemic. Doctors of the World has translated government guidance into 60 languages. Ensure all staff can access translated materials and are proactively signposting patients to COVID-19 guidance in their language.

Consider adding a dedicated message to your phone service directing patients to translated guidance, displaying guidance in the most spoken languages within your patient group, and adding them to your website.

This toolkit is designed to support primary care staff to implement inclusive policies and ensure everyone in the community can get the most out of General Practice during COVID-19, and beyond.

For more support, please consider registering as a Safe Surgery.

Doctors of the World's (DOTW) Safe Surgeries initiative supports GP practices to tackle the barriers to healthcare faced by people in vulnerable circumstances, especially migrants. Through its membership network of over 340 GP practices (and counting), it aims to spread and celebrate good practice in inclusive and welcoming primary healthcare.

A Safe Surgery can be any GP practice that commits to taking steps to ensure their services are available to everyone in their community. At a minimum, this means ensuring that language or lack of ID, proof of address or immigration status are not barriers to patient registration.

Member practices receive free resources, training (where available), a regular newsletter with policy updates and good practice tips, links to a national network of practices, and access to expert advice from DOTW for complex entitlement issues.

Signing up is easy, and free. Fill out this quick form and DOTW will be in touch.

DOTW UK

Go to doctorsoftheworld.org.uk for the following reports:

- **Healthcare entitlement in England 2018**
- **Closing the Gaps in Healthcare Access: United Kingdom 2017**
- **Registration Refused: A study on access to GP registration in England Yearly since 2015**

Join our network of Safe Surgeries

To join our growing network of Safe Surgeries, or for more information and handy resources, visit our website:

doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/safe-surgeries

Email: SafeSurgeries@doctorsoftheworld.org.uk

Follow us [@DOTW_UK](https://twitter.com/DOTW_UK)

Want to spread the word?

Use our Safe Surgeries peer-to-peer training resources if you're interested in raising awareness in your workplace:

doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/train-your-peers