

To: All NI GDPs

BY EMAIL AND POST

5 March 2020

Dear Colleague

Practice Preparations for COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

You will be aware that there are now 3 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Northern Ireland and that it is likely this number will increase significantly. Given that there are approximately 1.7 million GDS courses of dental treatment each year in Northern Ireland it is important that all dental staff are aware of the steps that can be taken to reduce the risk of virus spread by practices.

At this point guidance has been developed by Public Health England on how health professionals should manage patients who may be infected with COVID-19. The full, detailed guidance is available at the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/wuhan-novel-coronavirus>

The main principles, however, are:

- **Identify potential cases as soon as possible**
- **Prevent potential transmission of infection to other patients and staff**
- **Avoid direct physical contact, including physical examination, and exposures to respiratory secretions**
- **Isolate the patient, obtain specialist advice from local Trust**

The key actions you should take if you suspect that a patient presenting to your practice is infected with COVID-19 are set out in a [flow chart](#) located on the GDS Coronavirus webpage: <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3111.htm>

If the patient's signs, symptoms and history lead you to one of the **consider alternative diagnosis** boxes then it is unlikely the patient is actually infected with COVID-19 and you should treat the patient as normal using standard, universal infection control procedures.

If the patient's signs, symptoms and history lead you to the **case definition is met** box then follow the recommended actions. Note that the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) numbers can be found at this link:

[http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/HSC%20Organisations%20Single%20Point%20of%20Contact%20\(SPOC\)%20for%20Coronavirus.pdf](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/HSC%20Organisations%20Single%20Point%20of%20Contact%20(SPOC)%20for%20Coronavirus.pdf)

In the coming days, the Board will issue a short audit for each practice to complete. This will instruct practice staff on practical steps that may be taken to reduce the risk of virus spread and at the same time seek assurances from practices that appropriate action has been taken.

The audit will focus on three areas:

1. **Communication and information:** Ensuring that practices are receiving HSC emails, checking the dental section of the BSO website and communicating appropriate information to patients.
2. **Preparation of practice accommodation:** Identification of a suitable space/room in the practice for patient/patient group isolation and briefing of staff on the potential use of the space/room.
3. **Practice preparation for incident management:** Review of the practice's business continuity plan and development and rehearsal of the practice's COVID-19 triage protocols and isolation procedures.

The audit will be accompanied by information explaining how to undertake any new tasks that practices may not be familiar with (e.g. accessing HSC emails, identifying a suitable space/room for isolating patients).

Please be aware that this is an emerging and rapidly changing situation. While HSCB will endeavour to email all updates to practitioners as soon as possible, it is incumbent upon you to frequently check the Coronavirus webpage on the dental section of the BSO (see link to website below). The Board will not be sending hard copies of future updates by post.

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3111.htm>

I have developed a short FAQ document (which is also available at the above webpage) to address possible queries which may not be clearly answered by the links overleaf. If you have any queries regarding this letter or you would like to suggest further questions to be added to the FAQ section then please contact GDS.Correspondence@hscni.net

Yours sincerely



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