



Southern Health
and Social Care Trust

Quality Care - for you, with you

Winter Preparedness Plan 2024/25



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Winter Preparedness Plan

Introduction



Context



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Introduction

Winter is typically a period when demand for our services is significantly greater than the capacity within our Hospitals and supporting community services. In order to protect our services, we prepare an annual Winter Preparedness Plan to outline proposals to address the predicted increase in demand for our services, particularly within our Emergency Department.

Our Winter Preparedness Plan sets out the arrangements the Southern Health and Social Care Trust will put in place to respond to anticipated additional pressures during the winter months 2024/25.

Context

Alongside the Winter Preparedness Plan, the Trust will continue to manage any further Covid-19 surge and/or increase in respiratory illness through:

- Review of surge and business continuity plans.
- Standing up of Escalation Protocols as required.
- Completion of workforce analysis and development of contingency plans, including staff redeployment if this becomes necessary.
- Risk assessments and introduction of appropriate enhanced infection prevention and control measures in line with guidance.
- Within the community setting, prioritise those with greatest assessed health and care needs based on a Red, Amber and Green rating system.
- Ensure flexible working for staff.

Timely Patient Discharge

Across our hospital sites, we anticipate an increase in demand for inpatient beds. Therefore, timely discharge of patients once medically fit, remains key to ensuring all patients can be accommodated when admission is required.

An unnecessary or prolonged stay in hospital can be detrimental for a patient's recovery. It is vital that patients leave hospital within 48 hours of being assessed as medically fit.

Despite the best efforts outlined above, there will be times that patients have to stay in the ED whilst waiting for a bed to become available in a ward. Potential further surges of flu or other respiratory illnesses will impact on service delivery and bed availability.

General Practice Teams

Our Winter Preparedness Plan highlights the need for partnership working with Primary Care and the need for close working between General Practice and the Trust to ensure the smooth transition of patients between services.

We are committed to ongoing collaboration to ensure patient benefit and experience.

Financial Constraints

With limited recurrent growth funding and significant existing pressures we will continue to identify any emerging financial pressures during this winter period and as a result of any further surges.

The Trust will continue to assess resource requirements and use established channels and processes with the Department of Health (DOH) to secure additional resources as required.

External Communications

Responding to seasonal pressures is a complex and dynamic process and our communications will be tailored to meet need throughout the delivery period. The corporate communications team have prepared a Winter Pressures Communications Plan for 2024/25.

External Communications

- We will run targeted Emergency Department messaging campaigns and promote the 'Phone First' system and early discharge messaging on our social media channels;
- As Emergency Department pressures increase we will, in exceptional circumstances, advise of busy status of the Emergency Department(s) and signpost the public where possible to access alternatives;
- We will liaise with the media when necessary to highlight ongoing difficulties/pressures;
- We will issue briefing materials to public representatives and will include Winter Messaging in our virtual briefings with them as appropriate; and
- We will link with the Health and Social Care region and support regional messaging when the system gets 'hot' and issue messaging aligned with regional priorities.

Internal Communications

Internal Communications

- We will promote our key messages to help alleviate winter pressures throughout the Trust;
- We will keep staff informed about the current pressures and work with them to communicate challenges externally; and
- We will run internal promotional campaigns targeting staff to avail of the vaccination programmes.



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Maximising
Ambulance
Capacity



Reducing ED
Attendance and
Admission
Avoidance



Timely Hospital
Discharge



Improving
Patient Flow



Key Enablers



Maximising Ambulance Capacity

Southern Trust Nursing Home Pilot - effective alignment, integration and communication between nursing homes, GP core services (in-hours and Urgent Care), GP-enhanced services, Trust services (including Acute Care at Home) and Northern Ireland Ambulance Services (NIAS), there is the potential to improve the care experience for these patients and reduce demand on Emergency Department services.

As part of our Winter Preparedness Plan, where appropriate, NIAS and nursing homes will in the first instance contact Acute Care at Home prior to transporting to ED if the patient is aged 65+. Acute Care at Home will also continue to accept direct referrals from GP's, Urgent Care Centres and specialist community teams.

Where appropriate NIAS will transport children and young people directly to paediatric ward or units such as inter-hospital transfers/repatriations.

Reducing ED attendance and Admission Avoidance

- Primary Care Screening at the Front Door - this ensures you are directed to the right service in a timely manner.
- Phone First - Phone First for Urgent Care. From Monday to Friday between 9am and 9pm – patients with urgent but not life threatening symptoms should phone 0300 123 3 111 before attending the Emergency Departments or Minor Injuries Services at Daisy Hill, Craigavon Area or South Tyrone hospitals. This reduces the number of people attending our Emergency Departments, directing to appropriate alternative services e.g. Minor Injuries Unit, Urgent Care Centre and ambulatory pathways
- The Trust will provide NIAS access to a direct referral pathway to Phone First.
- Same Day Emergency Care allows specialists, where appropriate, to assess, diagnose and treat patients on the same day of arrival who would otherwise have been admitted to hospital - services include medical, surgical, cardiology and respiratory ambulatory.
- Frailty at the Front Door - Development of a frailty integrated team approach ED interface service, meeting the needs of frailty patients in the Emergency Department.
- Providing Paediatric Advice Line (PAL) for GPs and other health professionals

Improving Patient Flow

- Rapid access to diagnostics and bloods - this ensures informed decision making, reducing waiting times for treatment and improving health outcomes.
- Effective Ward process to improve patient flow, expedite discharges and reduce length of stay.
- Control Room - hospital site management function to ensure safe and efficient patient flow
- Paediatric in-reach - additional staff supporting ED - enhanced medical cover in the evenings to support ED for Blossom Children and Young People's Centre in Craigavon Area Hospital and Daisy Paediatric Ward in Daisy Hill Hospital.
- Ability to flex up paediatric beds in Blossom and Daisy overnight with additional nurse and nursing assistant on night duty
- Specialist Pharmacist for Discharge Letter completion to facilitate accurate timely discharge letters
- Improve discharge rates at weekend

Timely Hospital Discharge

- Single Discharge Team - identify appropriate community placements and co-ordinate the assessment and discharge planning process and advise and support ward staff to plan the care you may need after you leave hospital.
- Enhanced community capacity - we will create and access increased levels of care packages within domiciliary care and care home settings to better support avoidance of admission to and timely discharge from hospital through the early review team who will review care packages to ensure they are still the best support for the individual and to identify areas for improvement.
- Care line live - All-in-one home care management software supporting our domiciliary care staff to provide excellent, person-centred care.
- Utilisation of care home capacity - provided additional resource into our statutory care home to maximise bed capacity

Key Enablers

Protecting
and Promoting
Staff Health
and Wellbeing

Digital
Solutions

Leadership

Monitoring
and Reporting

People

Winter
plan

Protecting and Promoting Staff Health and Wellbeing

- We will provide support to staff across a range of service areas including human resources, occupational health, psychology, infection prevention and control and health improvement.
- Staff Health and Wellbeing Support - We will continue to provide through our 'U Matter' staff and wellbeing hub a range of staff health and wellbeing resources to support our staff, including on-line nutrition and exercise programmes, stress management sessions, advice and support on a range of issues such as managing anxiety, building resilience and coping mechanisms, sleep well resources and mental health support for adults and young people.
- The Trust's U Matters wellbeing hub continues to provide staff with resources and information to support them to manage their emotional health and wellbeing, including a weekly newsletter which is circulated widely.
- The Trust will also undertake the flu and covid vaccination programmes for staff and take forward actions to maximise uptake, including early planning, peer vaccinators and targeting areas with low uptake.
- In line with normal Winter Preparedness Planning arrangements, staff leave over holiday periods will be carefully managed to ensure appropriate staffing levels are in place to maintain appropriate staffing levels and the safe delivery of service.

Digital Solutions

- We are preparing for encompass Go-Live - encompass is a Health and Social Care programme that will create a single digital care record for every citizen in Northern Ireland who receives health and social care. encompass aims to provide patients and service users with the safest, highest quality of care that is possible.
- Care Line Live - We have introduced iPads to Domiciliary Care teams which will revolutionise the way care is delivered to patients in their homes. The move towards modernising this service will free up staff time, allowing them to have more time to deliver care to clients.
- We have introduced handheld translation device to improve communication between staff and patients who do not speak English in Craigavon Area and Daisy Hill Hospital Emergency Departments and GP practices across the Southern Trust area. The pocket-sized digital kit can translate up to 108 languages through audio or text in real time.

Leadership

- We are committed to ensuring that there is ongoing visible leadership, which is enhanced during periods of increased service pressures, to support and listen to our staff.
- Frequent staff engagement and communication at all levels is fundamental to our aim to be a learning and listening organisation.
- Implement Trust surge plans and business continuity arrangements, as required.

Monitoring and Reporting

- The oversight of the Winter Preparedness Plan will be provided by the Timely Care Steering Group, this will ensure services have a 'joined up' approach to enable timely access for all patients requiring unplanned access to treatment and care.
- At times of additional pressures, there will be enhanced oversight arrangements at all levels across the organisation to address pressures.
- The Regional Control Centre will support all Trusts with identifying, sharing and supporting the implementation of good practice at all points in the patient journey to ensure the effective use of available capacity.

People

- Our people – patients, service users, carers, families and staff – are at the centre of everything we do in the Southern Trust. We are committed to providing safe, effective and compassionate care, in spite of forthcoming pressures.
- To help alleviate unnecessary pressures on our system, it is important that patients, service users and carers and families are guided by the Choose Well advice. The Choose Well campaign aims to raise awareness of the range of health services available to treat everything from a common cold to a major emergency.

How can you help?



Selfcare: To treat an ache, pain, upset stomach, cough or cold, get plenty of rest, take simple pain killers if needed and use over the counter medicines.



Children's symptom checker: If your child is feeling unwell, you can use our symptom checker below to gain a better understanding of what might be happening and where to get treatment. [Visit the Children's Symptom Checker here.](#)



Your local pharmacist: Can give confidential, expert advice and treat a number of minor ailments such as aches and pains, skin conditions, allergies, eye conditions, upset stomach and emergency contraception.



Phone First: 0300 123 3111: Patients can be given an appointment for a minor injury unit or urgent care services, directed to their GP or asked to attend Emergency Department.



Urgent Care Out of Hours: For people needing urgent medical treatment but cannot wait until their GP practice opens. Available from 6.00pm during the week until your GP surgery opens the next morning; 24 hours on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

Your GP: Provide expert medical advice and diagnosis, referring you for further care or consultation as needed.



Primary Eyecare Assessment & Referral Service: Treats sudden eye conditions such as red eyes, sudden reduction in vision, eye pain or a foreign body in the eye. [Find out more on the HSC website](#)



Mental healthcare: If you are experiencing mental health difficulties there are a range of services available to help you. More information is available on the [NI Direct website](#).



Emergency Dental Treatment: If patients have an urgent dental need they can follow advice on the [HSC website](#).



Minor Injuries Unit: Treats injuries that are not life threatening such as broken bones, sprains, bites and burns.



Urgent Care Centre: Treats injuries that are not life threatening such as broken bones, sprains, minor scalp wounds and suturing of minor wounds.



Emergency Department: Provides the highest level of emergency care for patients, especially those with acute illnesses or trauma, such as heart attacks, stroke, serious accidents or head injuries.