

Medway NHS Foundation Trust – COVID-19 update

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Trust began to see the number of patients with COVID-19 rising in November 2020, following a period of lower case numbers during the summer and early autumn.
- 1.2. The rate of infection within the communities of Medway and Swale has been extremely high, and for a number of weeks was the highest in the country. It is therefore not surprising that this translated into a sharp increase in hospital admissions, and in the number of patients requiring intensive care.
- 1.3. From July onwards we had focused on a programme of service recovery, making significant progress towards restoring services that had been paused during the first wave of the pandemic.
- 1.4. Unfortunately, as the second wave began to put pressure on the hospital, we had to take the difficult decision to once again pause elective surgery, while continuing to carry out cancer and urgent operations.
- 1.5. At the time of writing we continue to see the number of cases rising, and are working closely with the ambulance service and other partners within the health and care system to provide the best of care to our patients.
- 1.6. In line with national guidance, and to limit the spread of infection, we have sadly had to once again limit visitors to the hospital. Our staff have done their best to connect very unwell patients with their loved ones by using iPads, and by helping relatives leave messages online with special postcards, which are given to or read out to patients. We know from feedback that this is greatly appreciated.

2. LATEST POSITION

- 2.1. During the second wave the number of COVID-19 patients being cared for at Medway Maritime Hospital has greatly exceeded the number at the peak of the first wave in April 2020.
- 2.2. Pausing non-urgent surgery has enabled us to create capacity within a number of wards, and to expand our critical care beds to cope with the surge in demand.
- 2.3. At times patients have waited longer than we would wish to be seen and treated or admitted. We continue to work with colleagues in the ambulance service and with

other partners in Kent and Medway to minimise waits and ensure patients are cared for safely.

- 2.4. Thanks to a better understanding of the disease, and the use of dexamethasone, the mortality rate in the hospital associated with COVID-19 is lower than during the first wave.
- 2.5. Sadly, however, at the time of writing, 564 patients have lost their lives since the start of the pandemic, including three members of staff.
- 2.6. On a more positive note, nearly 2,000 patients have been discharged home to be with their loved ones.

3. WORKFORCE

- 3.1. We have seen a higher than usual staff absence rate. This is due to a number of staff contracting the virus, as well as many needing to self-isolate. At times we have had around 10 per cent absent, and appreciate the flexibility of other staff who have been temporarily redeployed to ensure we can maintain safe staffing levels across all areas.
- 3.2. Staff are provided with appropriate PPE throughout the hospital, and we have put in place other measures to reduce transmission of the virus, such as social distancing in staff and public areas, and reminding colleagues to maintain the highest standards of hand hygiene at all times.
- 3.3. Lateral flow kits have been distributed to the majority of staff so they can undertake tests at home twice per week, recording their results online. These tests, which provide results within 30 minutes, help us limit the spread of infection from those who do not display symptoms.
- 3.4. We are incredibly proud of our staff who have continued to deliver the best of care during incredibly challenging times. We know this has been a stressful period and we support their wellbeing in a number of ways such as through a wellbeing hub, daily communications and opportunities to raise questions.

4. PATIENT TESTING

- 4.1. Patients are tested for COVID-19 on admission to the hospital and at regular intervals during their stay.
- 4.2. During December we were pleased to receive a number of additional machines providing rapid results, which is another way we are able to reduce the spread within the hospital.

5. VACCINATION PROGRAMME

- 5.1. On 17 December we began to administer the COVID-19 vaccine within the hospital, as one of the first vaccine hubs in the country.
- 5.2. This was a truly momentous day, bringing hope to us all. Some of our frontline staff were among the first to receive their jab. In line with the Government rollout, we are providing the Pfizer Biontech vaccine to care home staff from Medway and Swale to protect vulnerable people in local care homes. We are also vaccinating our patients over the age of 80.
- 5.3. At the time of writing we have vaccinated around 3,500 people, including around half of our workforce, with many more appointments made.
- 5.4. Some people have already had their second dose. From 11 January, in line with the Government announcement, appointments for second doses will be held within 12 weeks of the first.
- 5.5. We are proud of the speed and efficiency with which our vaccination hub was mobilised thanks to the team leading the programme.
- 5.6. We anticipate that as the lockdown takes effect, and assuming compliance with government advice, plus the rollout of the vaccine, numbers will reduce in due course.
- 5.7. We will continue to advise members of progress, including the restoration of elective surgery when appropriate.