

# Patients and the public must continue to seek medical help for serious conditions during this COVID-19 pandemic

## A statement from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges

07 April / 2020

During this COVID-19 pandemic it is vitally important that patients and the public recognise that they must continue to seek medical assistance if they have symptoms which cause concern, or they already are being treated for a serious health condition. The risk of developing other serious or life-threatening conditions remains unchanged and people must be fully confident that they can and should, seek medical assistance if they are worried about themselves or a relative.

The NHS not only remains open to see people with urgent and serious problems, it is actively asking that such people seek help. Urgent and acute illnesses or conditions will continue to be treated and the public must not hold back from seeking NHS help regarding serious illness in themselves or their family. This applies to new symptoms or recurrences of existing conditions.

The NHS has, understandably, undergone changes to accommodate the COVID-19 pandemic which means that routine or non-urgent appointments are likely to be postponed – but this does not apply to urgent or emergency illnesses, the management of poorly controlled or unstable long-term conditions or the provision of palliative and end of life care. We know from previous epidemics that there is a danger of increased harm and deaths from issues that are not related to COVID-19 because patients have not sought treatment for other urgent or serious health problems.

We understand that patients are anxious about making a GP appointment or going to hospital because they have concerns about leaving their homes and the risk of catching COVID-19. We also know that people do not want to place what they might perceive as an unnecessary burden on NHS and that services and staff resources will be stretched.

However, not seeking help when it is really required may place your health, and even your life, at risk. Deterioration of your condition will be worse for you and could place additional burden on the NHS.

This advice is entirely in keeping with [government guidance](#) which indicates that people are able to leave their homes in order to access medical care and it is imperative that this advice is followed.

The message from medical leaders across the UK is,

- You should continue to seek NHS help through your GP, NHS111, 999 or A&E if you or your family become acutely unwell and believe that you may be suffering from a serious or life threatening condition
- You should continue with ongoing treatments for all your medical conditions and attend any hospital or GP appointments that are requested. Routine care is being carried out, where possible, through 'phone calls or video links so you will not be asked to attend unless absolutely necessary
- Hospitals are safer than your own home if you are in need of emergency care. The reorganisation of services includes protecting patients who are being seen for conditions other than COVID-19.