

**Monday 30 November 2020**

## **Public urged to Think 111 First to help reduce waiting times for urgent and emergency care**

A new national initiative is encouraging people to contact NHS 111 before travelling to hospital or minor injuries treatment unit when seeking urgent and emergency care.

The new Think 111 First initiative launches on Tuesday 1 December, and asks people in need of urgent health care to contact NHS 111, either online or by phone, to be directed to the most appropriate healthcare service.

People with very serious or life-threatening health conditions, such as chest pain, severe bleeding or loss of consciousness, should still continue to phone 999 without delay.

By contacting NHS 111 first, people can be assured they are being referred to the right help for their condition, which might be to see their GP or pharmacist, or to go to an urgent treatment centre.

This will not only help patients to be seen quicker, but will also reduce unnecessary visits to some of the region's busiest healthcare facilities.

In situations where people contacting NHS 111 do need urgent or emergency care, a timed arrival slot will be arranged at the nearest minor injuries unit or, in some cases, at the nearest hospital emergency department.

Dr Andrew Girdher, Clinical Chair Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire CCG, said: "Our NHS is managing traditional winter pressures along with the additional demands of the coronavirus pandemic, so it's important we direct people who could be treated safely in other locations away from our hospitals, where space has significantly reduced due to social distancing requirements.

"We know that around 30 per cent of people in emergency departments arrive by ambulance or GP referral, and that a significant proportion of the remaining patients could be seen safely, and often more quickly, elsewhere.

"Think 111 First has already been trialled in other parts of the country, where positive results have been seen, including a drop in the number of people going to emergency departments and we are confident that similar success can be felt in our region.

"Getting Think 111 First up and running in our region has been a complex project, which has involved close and collaborative working from all parts of the health and care system, and I would like to thank all our partners for their commitment and ability to work at pace."

From Tuesday 1 December, healthcare facilities in our region, including the Great Western Hospital in Swindon, the Royal United Hospital in Bath and Salisbury District Hospital, along with three minor injury units and two urgent treatment centres, will begin using the new Think 111 First system.

People who arrive at one of these healthcare facilities without having first contacted NHS 111, will not be turned away, but may be asked to wait or be signposted to a more appropriate local healthcare service.

More information about Think 111 First, as well as details of all local health and care services, can be found online at [www.bswccg.nhs.uk](http://www.bswccg.nhs.uk).