

## **Urgent Care in Dorset – 111 First and Minor Injuries Units (MIUs)**

The way that Minor Injuries Units are accessed has been changing in Dorset since April 2020, allowing us to continue to provide responsive patient services whilst responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. In that time national guidance has also been published that sets out how urgent care services are expected to develop. This briefing note shares in one place the changes that have been made and how we expect the services to continue to evolve to best meet the needs of their communities.

### **Timeline of evolution**

#### **April 2020**

Changes were initially made to respond to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the impact on staffing (i.e. sickness absence) and the need to avoid having people together in waiting rooms. Our priority has been to maintain service delivery and ensure patient and staff safety.

We switched our MIU services to provide telephone support and offer face-to-face appointments only where strictly necessary. MIUs in Blandford, Portland and Sherborne were temporarily closed, with staff redeployed to support extended opening hours at Shaftesbury and Wimborne MIUs, prioritising those areas that had the highest demand and greatest staff resilience.

#### **December 2020**

The national 111 First model – which we're required to follow - was launched. This aims to persuade patients to contact NHS 111 or a GP practice first when they experience a health issue that is not immediately life-threatening.

The goal is to reduce the need for people to go to a physical location when accessing healthcare (and so reduce the risk of infections) through remote assessments/treatments and to ensure that patients are able to access the right care.

#### **June 2021**

With the easing of lockdown restrictions, we re-opened our full network of MIUs, with their pre-pandemic opening times. However, they now operate to the national 111 First model – asking people to go online or call 111 for an initial assessment, with a face-to-face MIU appointment booked if required.

We have already advertised this change in access via the media and social media and continue to share messages in local communities. People attending MIUs unannounced have continued to be seen by staff, who carry out assessments before deciding the best course of action, which is not always receiving immediate treatment.

### **The current position**

If people have an ailment or injury which requires urgent care, they are urged to use NHS 111 First by [going online](#) or calling NHS 111. Staff there will assess their needs, and may be able to provide treatment remotely and more rapidly. If face-to-face support is required, 111 staff will book an appointment at an appropriate location, at a time convenient to the caller.

If someone lives close to a minor injuries unit (MIU) and chooses to go there instead, staff will similarly assess their condition and agree the most appropriate course of action to meet their needs. They may direct them to another service, or book them an MIU appointment. However, depending on demand and patient need, the appointment may be later that day or the next.

### **Why have we shifted to the NHS 111 First model?**

Data shows that many people attending MIUs and Emergency Departments do not need to access treatment there, and can be supported in other ways.

Using 111 First can:

- save people travelling unnecessarily, for example through remote prescribing
- provide appointments and help avoid long waits for assessment/treatment where face-to-face support is required
- ensure people are directed to the most appropriate service
- free up NHS staff to treat the highest priority patients
- minimise the spread of COVID-19 or other infections by avoiding busy waiting rooms and maintaining social distancing.

### **Patient feedback**

Between January and June this year, 77% of those responding to a survey who accessed the MIU said they would do so again. Reasons for this included that it was straightforward, they received a good service, they accessed the care they needed, it was convenient to be given an arrival time and they were seen more quickly than they expected. Comments included:

*“The whole experience was seamless. From being triaged at home, given an appointment to being seen on time by fantastic caring professional staff. This service is a credit to NHS and so Covid safe it is to be highly commended and supported for its efficient and time efficient delivery of medical assistance.”*

*“Excellent experience, booked in by phone. Appointment started exactly on time. Treated by an experienced nurse practitioner and discharged within a few minutes. Highly recommended.”*

## **Next steps**

The 111 First approach has enabled MIUs to work more efficiently supporting people with minor injuries and urgent care needs remotely and face to face. We are committed to successfully implementing the model and improving the patient experience.

While we encourage people to use 111 First, we understand local concerns raised about some aspects of this approach. We would reiterate that people who go to an MIU without an appointment will continue to be assessed by our staff. Depending on the patient’s need, they will either be treated immediately, given a timed appointment that day or the next, directed to a more appropriate service or given advice on self-care.

We are mindful that there has been an increase in demand for 111 services and are increasing capacity at 111 to make sure that we can deliver an effective MIU service.

We will continue to trial the 111 First model for another six months and seek further feedback from stakeholders/service users about its implementation and effectiveness, before publishing a further update.

## **Any queries**

Please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service with any further queries or concerns, via: FREEPHONE 0800 587 4997

(When the office is unattended a confidential answerphone service is provided. If an interpreter is needed, one will be arranged for you.)

**By email:**  
[dhc.pals@nhs.net](mailto:dhc.pals@nhs.net)

## **By post:**

Patient Advice and Liaison Service, Dorset HealthCare, Sentinel House  
4-6 Nuffield Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset BH17 0RB

## **In person:**

Every service in the Trust has a local PALS representative available to help you. You can ask to speak to the local PALS representative when you are visiting one of our healthcare sites. If they are not available or you wish to speak to someone who does not work as part of the hospital/team, you can ask a member of staff to contact the PALS Coordinator for you.