

NHS tells patients to continue to access emergency care during industrial action

Published on Dec 14, 2022

People should continue to come forward for the care they need during industrial action, the NHS has said today.

Deputy Chief Nursing Officer Charlotte McArdle said it is “vital” they come forward for emergency care during strikes.

The call follows messaging issued by the NHS last week across NHS websites and social media telling patients that those needing urgent medical care should continue to come forward, especially in emergency and life-threatening cases – when someone is seriously ill or injured, or their life is at risk.

The NHS will contact anyone whose appointment has to be rescheduled due to strikes. If the NHS has not contacted you, please attend appointments as planned.

Patients should call 999 if it is a medical or mental health emergency (when someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk), with ambulances prioritising situations with an immediate risk to life.

In non-life threatening situations alternative support will be available through NHS 111 online or through the NHS 111 phone line.

General practice, community pharmacies, and dentistry are not impacted by the action.

The NHS has been preparing extensively for industrial action and for winter, with plans already in place to manage additional demand including 24/7 control centres, additional bed capacity, more mental health support for ambulance services and more community falls services.

NHS Deputy Chief Nursing Officer Charlotte McArdle said: “No one should hesitate in coming forward for emergency care tomorrow – it is vital anybody needing non-life threatening care should use 111 online and people should always call 999 in a life threatening emergency.

“Across the country, pharmacies and GP services will be operating as normal and patients should reach out to these local services as they normally would.

“While strikes will cause inevitable disruption to services, local NHS teams have worked hard to maintain as many appointments as possible, so it is important people attend appointments as planned unless they have been contacted for it to be rearranged”.

44 NHS trusts in England are expected to be affected on Thursday.

NHS England and local NHS areas have plans in place to ensure lifesaving care continues and to minimise disruption to patient care.

Regional and national teams will support local areas needing any further assistance on strike days to help local areas coordinate responses.

Last month, NHS England issued guidance to local NHS employers on what derogations they should seek from local union representatives to ensure certain vital services such as chemotherapy continue.

NHS Medical Director Professor Sir Stephen Powis said: “NHS teams have worked and continue to work hard to minimise disruption from strikes due to take place this month but there will be disruption to services.

“While patients may see different types of staff striking on different days, or their local NHS services impacted by strikes on some days but not others, the things patients should do to access NHS care remain the same.

“People must call 999 in any life-threatening emergency during strikes as well as attending pre-booked appointments as planned unless they have been contacted by their local NHS for it to be rearranged”.