



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

DATE **13 March 2020**

BY **Vaughan Gething AM, Minister for Health and Social Services**

As we move in our preparations from the “contain” to the “delay” phase of COVID-19, it is vital that our health and social care system in Wales is prepared. I have taken a number of decisions today to ensure early and decisive action to continue to provide care and support to the most vulnerable people in our communities, whilst also making sure organisations and professionals are supported to make timely preparations for the expected increase in the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19. I am choosing to act now before we see a significant surge in demand so that our services can be ready to act. A larger number of people requiring high levels of care is highly likely over the coming weeks.

I have taken advice from professional colleagues, including NHS Chief Executives and Medical Directors to inform my decision to act now to ensure our preparations can be made in a planned and measured way. I have therefore agreed a framework of actions, within which local health and social care providers can make decisions:

1. Suspend non-urgent outpatient appointments and ensure urgent appointments are prioritised
2. Suspend non-urgent surgical admissions and procedures (whilst ensuring access for emergency and urgent surgery)
3. Prioritise use of Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services to focus on hospital discharge and ambulance emergency response
4. Expedite discharge of vulnerable patients from acute and community hospitals
5. Relax targets and monitoring arrangements across the health and care system
6. Minimise regulation requirements for health and care settings
7. Fast track placements to care homes by suspending the current protocol which gives the right to a choice of home
8. Permission to cancel internal and professional events, including study leave, to free up staff for preparations.
9. Relaxation of contract and monitoring arrangements for GPs and primary care practitioners.
10. Suspend NHS emergency service and health volunteer support to mass gatherings and events

These actions will allow for services and beds to be reallocated and for staff to be redeployed and retrained in priority areas.

Health boards and health care providers will begin to contact anyone affected by these decisions over the coming days as these actions are phased in. Access to cancer and other essential treatments such as renal dialysis for example will of course be maintained.

Our NHS Direct Wales online service and the 111 telephone number are available and has been protecting our vital primary care and emergency department services from undue demand.

The key principle is to keep people safe and to keep patients out of clinical settings if there is no urgent need to attend.

The Welsh NHS will play a central role in dealing with the virus, particularly for some of the most vulnerable in our society. The measures which have been announced today in relation to NHS treatment will mean that the service can act now to prepare before the peak, and operate at maximum capacity as cases increase. Some of the measures will have implications for local government services, and we will work through these in partnership.

Our NHS and Social Care system is working hard to care for those people who have been confirmed with coronavirus whilst also continuing to deal with the health and social care needs of the Welsh population. Our Staff at the front line are doing a fantastic job in extremely difficult circumstances as we emerge from a busy Winter period. I thank them for their hard work and perseverance. The welfare and well-being of all in Wales in the face of this pandemic challenge is my number one priority at this testing time.