

Covid-19

----- Guidance for practices



Date: 22.04.2020

Please be aware that this is a rapidly evolving situation.

A Londonwide Guide to practice closure consequent upon the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic

Scope of guidance

This guidance relates to practices that have no other option to close due to the impact of Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and is distinct from operating a safe practice policy via *triage at the door*. The circumstances of each practice will be different hence it is not possible to draft guidance that will cover all such circumstances, rather the guidance is intended to highlight the issues that you should be considering – if you require tailored advice, please contact our [GP Support Team](#). The guidance is correct at the point of publication but may be subject to change in the fast-moving environment in which we are working.

Background

Whilst closing a practice should be seen as a last resort, the reality is that the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic may render a practice unable to remain open due to staff illness and/or the obligation to self-isolate.

In order to safely close the practice assorted issues (including those of a contractual nature) need to be addressed in order to ensure the ongoing provision of safe patient care.

Anticipating closure

Unpalatable though it may be and at a time when you have overwhelming competing workload pressures, it is important to make anticipatory preparations to both minimise the risk of practice closure and mitigate the impact of practice closure in the event that it occurs.

This is particularly important if your practice is one of those that is more vulnerable to closure (for example, smaller practices or practices that have already be disproportionately impacted by staff illness). If you do have to close the practice, it is likely that this may only be on a temporary basis until sufficient staff are well and able to recommence a safe patient service.

In the first instance, it would be helpful to have discussions with your federation and/or your Primary Care Network (PCN) to see if the impact of staff illness can be mitigated by way of staff sharing or other measures.

Other bodies that may be able to provide assistance are listed later in this guidance.

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Which bodies should I inform and/or seek advice from?

You should inform the following bodies of your circumstances, together with intention to close the practice (and any interventions or assistance they could provide to prevent the closure) and seek their guidance:

- PCN: Your PCN may be able to assist by sharing resources to maintain safe general practice for your patient population.
- Federation: May also be able to assist to avert the closure of the practice and or help to facilitate other methods of maintaining safe general practice for your patient population.
- [GP Support Team](#): Please contact the Londonwide LMC's GP Support team if you require specific advice
- Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS England and Improvement (NHSE&I): They may be able to provide advice and/or assistance to avert the closure and would need to be involved in relation to the associated contractual issues.
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC), under [Regulation 15: Notice of changes](#) you have an obligation to notify the CQC of specified service changes (including closure).
- [Primary Care Support England](#) (PCSE), who would need to address the various administrative issues that fall under their aegis.

Who else should I inform?

- Your local secondary care providers.
- Your local pharmacists.
- Other local healthcare providers (for example the district nursing team, social prescribers etc)
- If your GMC registered address is the practice address, you might wish to change this to your home address in order that you do not miss any important hard copy GMC communications – you can do this [here](#).
- The post office (the post will need to be appropriately re-directed).
- Your telephony and IT providers.
- Your utilities provider.
- Your clinical waste collection service.
- All suppliers that deliver to the surgery.

Informing patients

It is imperative that you inform patients that the practice is closing temporarily, with a brief explanation as to the reasons why (without breaching the confidentiality of individual staff members) and **how they should access healthcare going forward**.

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Mechanisms that you might wish to use for this purpose may include a combination of the following:

- A physical sign at the practice entrance and/or door.
- A message on practice website.
- Email or text (with appropriate safeguards such that patient's contact details are not shared).
- Hard copy correspondence.
- Alerting the Patient Participation Group (PPG).
- Your CCG, NHSE&I and/or your PCN may be able to assist with the messaging.
- A message on your telephony system.
- A message on prescriptions.

Staff

The redeployment of any staff who may remain fit to work may have complex contractual implications – our [GP Support Team](#) will be able to advise you (or direct you to sources of advice) based on the individual circumstances.

Access to records

In order to provide ongoing care, appropriate provision will need to be made to allow the relevant healthcare professionals appropriate access to the records.

This will require liaison with the all the relevant parties (including the IT provider) and NHS Digital have provided guidance to enable [urgent access to medical records via GP Connect](#).