

May 2021

Guidance for engaging with MPs around 'Pharmacy Collect'

This briefing is for LPCs and contractors who are engaging with MPs around the 'Pharmacy Collect' service. This guidance outlines some core details about the service and includes some key messaging to help discussions with MPs.

Introduction

The Lateral Flow Device (LFD) distribution service – known informally as 'Pharmacy Collect' - aims to improve access to rapid COVID-19 testing for people in England. MPs will be interested to hear about how their constituents can benefit from the service and use their local pharmacies to access COVID-19 testing. PSNC has briefed supportive MPs about the service, also encouraging them to visit a pharmacy and try it out for themselves. A link to the briefing is available below, as well as some tips and guidance for talking to MPs about the service and about the wider community pharmacy landscape.

Core briefing information about 'Pharmacy Collect'

PSNC has communicated some key messages to MPs about the service, explaining its scope and how people can use it, including:

- The 'Pharmacy Collect' service allows everyone in England, including those without symptoms, to access lateral flow testing kits free of charge from local pharmacies to help improve access to regular, rapid COVID-19 testing.
- The service is designed for adults who are asymptomatic and will be useful for those who need to undertake regular COVID-19 tests, such as those who need to leave the house to go to work.
- Pharmacy teams can supply one box of tests per individual, which provides them with seven tests for use at home. This allows for twice-weekly testing over a three-week period (plus an extra test) and people are to self-administer the tests away from the pharmacy, e.g. at home.
- The service is funded by NHS Test and Trace, whose research into routine mass testing showed that participants preferred to access testing in the community and that pharmacists are trusted by their local communities, which led to the Government's decision to commission this service through community pharmacies.
- Although the service is optional, so far **9 out of 10 pharmacies in England have signed up to deliver the service**, as announced by the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. An online checker has been launched so people can **find their nearest pharmacy offering testing kits** by simply entering their postcode.

These messages were shared in the [linked briefing](#), which LPCs and contractors might like to use if any MPs ask for a summary briefing on the service.

PSNC is planning to brief a number of supportive MPs on the service and will encourage them to visit a local pharmacy to try out the service for themselves. MPs may also proactively contact LPCs or contractors enquiring about the service. Below are some key messages which might be helpful when discussing the service with MPs - either in person or via email - to help promote it and demonstrate the value of pharmacy services to the local community.

Key messages about 'Pharmacy Collect' to share with MPs

The following key messages will be helpful for LPCs and contractors wanting to highlight the positive impact of 'Pharmacy Collect' to local MPs.

Pharmacies provide a convenient location for people to access COVID-19 testing

Around 89% of the population in England has access to a community pharmacy within a 20-minute walk and in the areas of the highest deprivation, making pharmacies highly accessible. 9 out of 10 pharmacies in England have signed up to deliver the service, [9 out of 10 pharmacies in England have signed up to deliver the service](#), meaning that most people should be able to access testing kits from one of their local pharmacies. The service is optional to provide, so the high uptake is a testament to the commitment of pharmacy teams, who want to do as much as they can to support pandemic recovery.

Improved access to testing is an important part of England's COVID-19 recovery plan

'Pharmacy Collect' aims to improve access to rapid COVID-19 testing for people across England, helping them to return to work and education. MPs should be pleased to hear how the local pharmacy is supporting these efforts. It is hoped that widening the offer of tests will help to identify COVID-positive cases in the community and break the chain of transmission, avoiding the need for further lockdowns.

Offering access to tests is just one way in which pharmacies have contributed to efforts to tackle COVID-19

'Pharmacy Collect' is just one example of how pharmacy teams have contributed to efforts to tackle COVID-19 - be sure to highlight lots of local examples to showcase all of the good work teams have carried out during the pandemic. MPs will be keen to hear about any contributions to the COVID-19 vaccination programme - either through local pharmacy-led sites, or where team members are helping administer vaccinations. Of course, the day-to-day support offered by pharmacy teams is equally as important highlight. As pharmacies remained open throughout the entire pandemic, they have been a vital resource for patients, maintaining access to essential medicines and face-to-face healthcare advice to help people to stay well. Key points to evidence this include:

- PSNC's Pharmacy Advice Audit (see [infographic](#)) - the results of which showed that pharmacies have delivered healthcare advice at a rate of 48 million consultations per year.
- Pharmacies' role in the 2020/21 flu season - pharmacies administered over 2.6 million NHS flu vaccinations. This is over 1 million more people than last season, which is particularly impressive during a pandemic.
- Discharge Medicines Service launch – people discharged from hospital with new medicines may now be referred to a community pharmacy for extra support and guidance. The service aims to support those returning home after a hospital stay and is just another way in which pharmacies will be helping patients going forwards.

Other key messages to share with MPs

It is a good idea to highlight to your MPs all of the positive contributions made by local community pharmacies: we want to leave them with a positive impression of the sector and all that it is doing. But we also need to continue to highlight the challenges facing the sector. As key influencers, MPs will want to try and help if they understand the problem, so we should help them to understand the value of pharmacy, the challenges you are facing and the risks to their communities should any pharmacy support be taken away.

- Community pharmacies are a critical part of the NHS and they have much more to offer to benefit patients, local communities and local healthcare systems.
- Pharmacies have risen to the unprecedented health challenge presented by COVID-19; they made adaptations to ensure they could remain open and continue to provide vital medicines and services. Patients have relied on this support and the NHS has benefited from it.
- As well as dispensing prescription items in a COVID-secure way, pharmacies have delivered healthcare advice at a rate of more than 48 million consultations per year – they have been a buffer for the NHS, helping their local communities and reducing pressure on other NHS healthcare providers.

- Some pharmacy-led COVID-19 vaccination sites are up and running, but there could be a greater role for community pharmacy in this important programme. Booster vaccinations could be required in the future and second doses are also a growing challenge in which pharmacies could assist.
- NHS community pharmacies want to be able to continue to offer the informal face-to-face healthcare advice and clinical services that so many people want from them: but many of the informal consultations they provide do not have specific funding attached to them, and pharmacies cannot afford to subsidise the NHS.
- COVID-19 has put a combination of sustained pressures, both operational and financial, on pharmacies. A huge amount of work has been required in dealing with the pandemic and costs to businesses have included increased staffing costs, PPE, cleaning and social distancing measures. These have been significant and, coupled with a reduction in income from over-the-counter sales and services, have left many pharmacies facing serious financial challenges.
- Pharmacies did receive £370m in emergency loans to help them stay open during the pandemic in 2020, but that money has been spent on covering more than £400m of NHS costs, allowing pharmacies to continue offering vital patient services. Pharmacies cannot afford to pay back these emergency monies.

Actions for MPs

MPs will often ask if they can do anything to help and below are some actions to suggest to those who want to do more.

Local press release

MPs can help promote 'Pharmacy Collect' to their constituents by issuing a supportive press release - either in the local media or through their own websites. A template is [available here](#) - do remember that all quotes must be approved by the MP's office first.

Letters and questions to officials

If MPs show an interest in the financial pressures being faced by pharmacies and offer to do more to help, do ask if they are prepared to write a letter to the Chancellor pressing for additional financial support for community pharmacies to allow the sector to do more to support local communities. MPs can also submit parliamentary questions calling for similar. PSNC can help you to work with your MP to draft these.

APPG

MPs can also get involved in the work of the All-Party Pharmacy Group (APPG), which hosts events and coordinates parliamentary activities to promote pharmacy. If an MP would like to join as a member, or simply find out more about upcoming events, then please encourage them to email: contact@pharmacyappg.co.uk

Contact

For more information or for help engaging with a local MP, please contact: jessica.ferguson@psnc.org.uk