

## Weston A&E overnight temporary closure

### FAQs -4 July

**Q: Why is A&E being closed overnight?**

**A:** The decision to temporarily close A&E overnight from 10pm to 8am from 4 July 2017 is because we can't recruit enough permanent doctors to fully staff an A&E team 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and in particular, to have sufficient doctors to staff a rota with overnight duties to make sure we can run the service safely at night.

Patient safety is always our number one priority which is why we have acted to close the A&E at Weston on a temporary basis between 10pm and 8am from 4 July 2017. It is our ability to recruit that is the problem, not our ability to care.

**Q: What evidence is there for making these changes?**

**A:** We do not have enough permanent staff to safely deliver services on a 24/7 basis. Despite significant efforts, we just can't recruit enough permanent doctors and are very dependent on temporary and locum staff which is not sustainable.

We need 23 doctors in A&E. Currently 13 are filled by our own staff, leaving 10 posts to be filled by agency and locum doctors.

The risk of not filling a shift with specialist doctors, vital to providing safe patient care, is unacceptably high. This is also not just an issue about the number of staff on duty at any one time; we need a permanent team to lead and develop our urgent and emergency care service to make it the best it can be for our patients.

This situation has been fragile for some time and was reinforced by the recent CQC report published on 14 June 2017 which identified a risk of falling short of providing safe care overnight in A&E because of insufficient doctors to staff a rota overnight.

**Q: When will the temporary closure operate?**

**A:** The A&E department will temporarily close overnight from 4 July 2017 from 10pm and 8am. It will reopen every morning at 8am and a full service will run during the day, which is when 80% of patients attend.

**Q: How many patients will be affected by the temporary closure?**

**A:** Only 20% of patients use A&E services during the hours of 10pm – 8am, which is approximately 27 people a night.

Out of the 27 patients attending during these times on average 11 patients will need to be seen outside North Somerset, with 6 or 7 patients being admitted to neighbouring hospitals. There are 15 or so patients who attend our A&E at night who walk in the department and require urgent care. After 4 July, they should dial 111, the non-emergency NHS helpline to seek advice and support. They may be referred to the out of hours GP service, or to overnight community care services until the following day when they can see their GP or other care provider. If they need emergency care, this will be available from either the ambulance service or a neighbouring A&E department.

**Q: How have you arrived at the figures quoted in terms of how many people will be impacted by the temporary closure? Do they taken into account summer tourist season peaks for example?**

**A:** The system has used historic data on all attendances and admissions to Weston A&E to carry out modelling analysis which provides the average number of people likely to be affected by the temporary closure. Monthly seasonality and arrival times throughout the night have been included in order to give a true reflection.

**Q: Weston has an increased population during the summer with an influx of up to 3m visitors each year. How can Weston cope without a 24/7 accident and emergency department?**

**A:** The decision to temporarily close A&E overnight from 10pm to 8am from 4 July 2017 is because we can't recruit enough permanent doctors to fully staff an A&E team 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and in particular, to have sufficient doctors to staff a rota with overnight duties to make sure we can run the service safely at night.

Patient safety is always our number one priority which is why we have acted to close the A&E at Weston on a temporary basis.

The Weston Area Health NHS Trust Board, which runs the hospital, has discussed and is confident that appropriate contingency arrangements are in place to make sure local residents and visitors during the summer holiday period can access alternative urgent and emergency services during the time of the temporary overnight closure of Weston's A&E department.

This will only affect a relatively small number of patients of the 27 who use Weston's A&E overnight. On average 11 patients per night will need to be seen in hospitals outside North Somerset with 6-7 of these potentially being admitted to neighbouring hospitals.

For context, Bristol Hospitals see over 350 emergencies per day and over 150 emergency admissions per night.

**Q: Where will patients go during the hours that A&E is closed?**

**A:** During the temporary overnight closure patients who need emergency care will be diverted to one of the three neighbouring hospitals with A&Es at the Bristol Royal Infirmary, Southmead Hospital in Bristol or Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton.

Patients who arrive at A&E independently between 10pm-8am and need urgent care, but not emergency care, should call 111 to get advice and support. Depending on their needs they may be referred to the out of hours GP service or to overnight community care services until the following day when they can see their GP or other care provider. Additional resources are in place to support the out of hours GP service.

**Q: How will people access a hospital that is potentially further away from their home?**

**A:** Patients who would normally be transported by ambulance will continue to travel by ambulance to another local hospital. If admitted to hospital for a longer period, they will be transferred back to Weston as soon as is clinically appropriate, usually within 2-3 days to continue their treatment locally, or they will be treated and discharged from the receiving hospital.

**Q: If they are admitted to another hospital how will they get back to North Somerset?**

**A:** If a patient is likely to need more than 48hrs in hospital but is in a stable condition we will aim to transfer them back to Weston General Hospital to continue their treatment and care. However, patients who are in a critical condition will only be transferred back to Weston when it is safe and clinically appropriate to do so, usually within 2-3 days.

If a patient recovers within 48 hours and doesn't need ongoing care and treatment, they will be discharged from the hospital they were admitted to.

**Q: If patients are taken to a neighbouring A&E unit and then discharged, how will they get home?**

**A:** As usual when being treated and discharged from A&E, patients are asked to make their own way home. If needed, staff at the hospital will be able to advise them, ensuring they can return home as soon as possible.

Patients may be able to claim a refund of reasonable travel costs under the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS). For more information about this they should ask a member of staff or see [www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Travelcosts.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Travelcosts.aspx)

**Q: How will you decide on what hospital to send seriously ill patients to?**

**A:** Ambulance staff have access to real time data to help them make these decisions. This is how the system currently operates with the most seriously ill patients in North Somerset already going by ambulance straight to specialist centres in Bristol or Taunton for their care, for example for cardiac and stroke patients and for children who require emergency care

overnight and this will continue. These seriously ill patients are already not treated at Weston but taken to bigger more specialist centres nearby and this won't change.

**Q: How will the temporary overnight closure impact children should they need emergency or urgent care overnight?**

**A:** Children who require emergency care overnight are already transported by ambulance to specialist centres in Bristol and Taunton and this will continue.

Anyone with urgent but non-life-threatening symptoms should call NHS 111 to seek advice and support and will be directed to the most appropriate medical care for their needs.

**Q: Will the other hospitals be able to cope when they are already busy?**

**A:** The Weston Area Health NHS Trust Board, which runs Weston General Hospital, has discussed and is confident that appropriate contingency arrangements are in place to make sure local residents can access alternative urgent and emergency services during the time of the temporary overnight closure of Weston's A&E department. The NHS in this area is working closely together and neighbouring hospitals, local GPs, and the ambulance service have been part of the planning team to make sure these alternative arrangements are in place.

This temporary overnight closure will only affect a relatively small number of patients of the 27 who use Weston's A&E overnight. On average 11 patients per night will need to be seen in hospitals outside North Somerset with 6-7 of these potentially being admitted to neighbouring hospitals.

For context, Bristol Hospitals on average sees over 350 emergencies per day and over 150 emergency admissions per night.

**Q: Will the ambulances be able to cope with taking extra patients to neighbouring hospitals?**

**A:** The Weston Area Health NHS Trust Board has discussed plans with local NHS partners and South Western Ambulance Service and is confident that appropriate contingency arrangements are in place to make sure local people can access alternative urgent and emergency services during the time of the temporary overnight closure of Weston's A&E department.

South Western Ambulance Service is being given extra funding to help manage the additional demand as a result of the temporary overnight closure.

Most seriously ill patients in North Somerset already go by ambulance straight to specialist centres in Bristol and Taunton, and this won't change.

Paramedics are highly trained to deal with the transportation of seriously ill patients and with contingency plans in place the neighbouring hospitals are well prepared to receive these patients.

**Q: Will the wait times for ambulances at night be longer?**

**A:** Calls to 999 will be prioritised in accordance to the needs of the patients as they are now. Patients who do not have life threatening injuries or symptoms are sometimes already asked to wait longer whilst those with life threatening injuries or symptoms are taken by ambulance to A&Es, and this same protocol will remain in place.

**Q: Will this closure have an effect on A&E during the day?**

**A:** No. During the day A&E at Weston General Hospital will continue to be open. This is when 80% of patients use the service.

**Q: When will A&E be open during the day?**

**A:** The A&E department will be open during the day from 8am until 10pm. The temporary closure is during the hours of 10pm – 8am only.

**Q: Will A&E be busier during the day as people will wait until after 8am to seek medical advice?**

**A:** A&E should only be used for serious life-threatening emergencies. We would expect patients to continue to use the service in this way. Weston Area Health NHS Trust will monitor and make sure the staffing in A&E can meet any increased demand on reopening in the morning and during known peaks in demand through the day.

Anyone with non-emergency symptoms should call NHS 111 to seek advice and support to be directed to the most appropriate medical care for their needs.

Anyone who has a serious life-threatening condition should call 999.

**Q: When will you reopen A&E services through the night?**

**A:** Overnight services will remain closed until we are confident we can deliver a safe and sustainable service throughout the night. We know we have ongoing challenges with recruiting the right number of permanent doctors needed to fully staff an A&E team 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (a full emergency department requires 5-8 consultants and 6-8 middle grade doctors) and in particular, to have sufficient doctors to staff a rota with overnight duties to ensure we can run the service safely at night.

Whilst we are doing all we can to recruit permanent staff, we recognise that we need to look at different ways to provide overnight services such as developing a new model of care, in order to be able to deliver this. We are working already with our staff, NHS partners, commissioners, regulators and local communities to develop a long-term solution to our ongoing challenges with A&E. Our goal is to make sure local people can access safe, high

quality, sustainable urgent and emergency care services from wherever they live in North Somerset.

Our focus to date, quite rightly, has been on ensuring robust arrangements are in place to ensure patients that need emergency treatment at night are treated safely at an alternative neighbouring A&E. If patients need urgent but not emergency care, the most appropriate care can be accessed locally from out-of-hours community health care providers and the out-of-hours GP service by ringing 111. Anyone with an immediate life-threatening condition should call 999, as they would now.

Our priority now and for the short term is to continue to work in collaboration with the local health system to develop our overnight service model so that we can reopen overnight services at Weston A&E as soon as possible.

**Q: Who decides when the A&E will reopen overnight?**

**A:** The temporary overnight closure will be reviewed at two monthly intervals at Trust Board meetings and at the A&E Delivery Board that is chaired by commissioners and made up of all providers of urgent care services across the area. This is the body responsible for ensuring all parties work together to provide appropriate urgent care services for the local population. It will be a joint decision taken by the Board and health service commissioners (the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Groups) to reopen overnight services at Weston.

**Q: How will the closure affect other health services in North Somerset?**

**A:** We are anticipating an increased demand for primary and community care services. Our partners have been involved in all the contingency planning and have plans in place to support the needs of these patients locally.

**Q: What will Weston do if someone very ill turns up at A&E during the hours of closure?**

**A:** Anyone who has a serious life threatening condition should call 999 straight away rather than travelling to hospital alone and an ambulance will be sent to their address.

Two telephones will be available outside the hospital for anyone who does travel to the hospital, connecting them immediately to a health care professional for advice on the most appropriate service they require, depending on their needs.

Weston General Hospital has a clear operating procedure in place for ensuring safe management of attending patients between 10pm-8am.

**Q: Is this temporary closure going to predetermine the future of A&E services at Weston in light of the recent public engagement work?**

**A:** No. The temporary closure of A&E services overnight does not pre-determine the outcome of the engagement work on future services at Weston General Hospital.

The overnight temporary closure is on the grounds of patient safety because we just can't provide safe staffing levels overnight, as emphasised in our recent CQC report published on 14 June 2017.

No final decision has been taken on the future of any services at Weston Hospital, and we would like to stress that no significant permanent changes to Weston's A&E services or any other services in the hospital will be made without a full public consultation.

Work continues to find a long term solution and we are developing our initial ideas guided by senior local doctors and other experts and taking on board public and staff feedback and the learning from the Healthwatch report which will be published on 4 July. For more information visit [www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk/news/future-services-weston-general-hospital/](http://www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk/news/future-services-weston-general-hospital/)

It is imperative that local people can access safe, high quality urgent and emergency services from wherever they live in North Somerset. Some services are not sustainable in their current form and this is causing problems in meeting patient's needs.

**Q: Do you plan to close Weston General Hospital?**

**A:** No. As with any hospital, the services at Weston Hospital are part of a wider system of care and all partners are committed to making the hospital a success.

**Q: Why can't you just employ more doctors?**

**A:** Recruitment of doctors is a major issue for hospitals in the South West region, as well as across the country. It is particularly challenging for small, acute hospital trusts like Weston General Hospital which doesn't have the same level of service that larger teaching hospitals close by can offer doctors.

**Q: Is Weston General Hospital safe?**

**A:** Yes. The CQC report published on 14 June 2017 acknowledges that safety across the hospital has improved. All services at Weston General Hospital, other than overnight services at A&E, remain unaffected and continue to operate as normal delivering safe, high quality patient care.

**Q: Is the A&E unsafe because of the clinical care being delivered by staff?**

**A:** Absolutely not. Staff in A&E, and across the hospital, continue to do a fantastic job delivering high quality care to all their patients.

The temporary closure of the A&E service overnight is about delivering a safe service overnight and we need the right number of doctors to do this– it is not about the clinical practice or competence of staff.

**Q: Should patients continue to attend Weston hospital?**

**A:** Yes. The Care Quality Commission rated caring across the organisation as 'good' and acknowledges that safety across the hospital has improved.

We want to reassure patients and the public that they should continue to attend the hospital for appointments, operations and treatment as planned.

**Q: Weston Super Mare is a growing town with many houses being planned and built. How can it be right that services are being reduced?**

**A:** The temporary overnight closure of A&E has been taken on the grounds of patient safety. No permanent changes to A&E services or any other services in the hospital will be taken without a full public consultation.

The A&E department will continue to be open during the hours of 8am-10pm which is when 80% of patients use the service and all other hospital services remain unaffected.

Our priority now and for the short term is to continue to work in collaboration with the local health system to develop our overnight service model so that we can reopen overnight services at Weston A&E as soon as possible.