

Weston A&E overnight temporary closure public FAQs-5 September

Q: Why has A&E been closed overnight?

A: The decision to temporarily close A&E overnight from 10pm to 8am from 4 July 2017 was taken 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 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 ongoing significant efforts, we 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 16 are filled by our own staff, leaving 7 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 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 is A&E temporarily closed?

A: The A&E department is temporarily closed overnight from 10pm and 8am. It reopens every morning at 8am and a full service runs during the day, which is when 80% of patients attend. Patients are able to attend the department right up to 10pm.

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

A: During the temporary overnight closure patients who need emergency care are 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.

It is worth noting that the most seriously ill or injured patients in North Somerset, and children who require emergency care overnight, already go by ambulance straight to specialist centres in Bristol and Taunton.

Patients who arrive at A&E themselves between 10pm-8am and need urgent care, but not emergency care, should call 111 to get advice and support. Two telephones are available outside the hospital and will connect immediately to a health care professional for advice on the most appropriate service required, depending on the needs.

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 is the NHS coping during the temporary overnight closure?

The local NHS is managing well since the temporary overnight closure began on 4 July 2017. Patients continue to receive safe care and the numbers of patients affected by the overnight temporary closure are in line with expectations. The local health system, including Weston, neighbouring hospitals, local GPs and the ambulance service, worked very hard in advance of the temporary closure to put in place the right plans to ensure patients who need emergency treatment during the night are treated safely at an alternative neighbouring A&E. We remain confident that these plans are working effectively.

Q: How many patients are affected by the temporary closure?

A: Since the temporary closure started, the numbers of patients affected are in line with our expectations and the numbers being admitted to neighbouring hospitals during the hours of 10pm and 8am are small:

- Around 4-5 people per night have attended other A&E departments themselves
- Around 9 people per night have been taken by ambulance to other A&E departments
- Around 5-6 patients per night have been admitted to another local hospital instead of Weston.

All patients continue to receive safe care.

Q: How have you arrived at the figures quoted of the people that have been impacted by the temporary closure?

A: The system is carefully monitoring and analysing patient activity data on a daily basis provided by Weston, the ambulance service and the neighbouring hospitals.

Q: Are the other hospitals coping with treating extra patients when they are already busy?

A: The local NHS is managing well since the temporary overnight closure began. To date, and in line with our analysis of projected impact, the number of people admitted to other hospitals during the hours of 10pm-8am are in line with expectations:

- Around 4-5 people per night have attended other A&E departments themselves
- Around 9 people per night have been taken by ambulance
- Around 5-6 patients per night have been admitted to another local hospital instead of Weston.

For context, the Bristol Hospitals on average see over 500 emergencies per day and over 150 emergency admissions per night.

Q: How will the hospitals cope when demand for services increases during winter and Weston A&E services overnight are not open?

A: Weston and the neighbouring hospitals have plans in place to manage the demand for services during the winter months. These plans are developed working closely with local health and social care organisations and will identify how services will adapt to manage increased demand during the temporary overnight closure.

Q: Is the ambulance service coping with taking extra patients to neighbouring hospitals?

A: South Western Ambulance Service has received extra funding to help manage demand during the temporary overnight closure and has been providing two extra ambulances to manage demand overnight. This capacity is based on detailed analysis of potential additional demand for 999 services and extra journey times as a result of the overnight closure. This provision is being reviewed on an ongoing basis in light of the actual demand on the service, and the resource will be adjusted accordingly if required.

Q: Are the wait times for ambulances at night longer?

A: Calls to 999 are prioritised in accordance to the needs of the patients. 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: Is A&E busier during the day as people 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. 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.

We are monitoring A&E and making 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.

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

A: Overnight services will remain closed until we as a system are confident that safe and sustainable staffing levels are in place throughout the night - patient safety remains our priority. Whilst we are doing all we can to recruit the right number of permanent doctors needed 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 ensure it can run the service safely at night, it continues to be an ongoing challenge.

We are therefore working in collaboration with North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group to develop a viable service model for overnight urgent care services at Weston in the short term. For example, we are looking at how patients with certain conditions, such as a fractured hip, could be admitted directly to Weston Hospital, what services are needed to treat them effectively and the number and type of staff needed to provide these services safely.

North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, who is responsible for commissioning services, is considering how the long term viability and stability of Weston General Hospital, including decisions on the future model of urgent and emergency care in Weston and the surrounding area, can be secured as part of the overall transformation of health and care services for North Somerset. Our joint 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, as close to home as possible.

Q: Is this temporary closure going to predetermine the future of A&E services at Weston?

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

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

No 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 12 week public consultation. For more information, visit www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk.

Q: What work is happening to look at the future for Weston General Hospital and how will this influence the future of A&E services?

A: On 3 October at the Governing Body Meeting, North Somerset CCG plans to formally launch their 'Commissioning Context' document which will set out the vision for comprehensive and excellent healthcare services for the people of Weston-super-Mare, Worle, Winscombe and the surrounding villages of the south Rurals. It will also include the process being developed to design a bright and exciting future for Weston General Hospital,

putting it at the heart of a more integrated and proactive local health care system designed to meet the specific needs of local people.

The plans are still being finalised but the CCG expects to start a period of public dialogue in October on the changes that are being developed in partnership with Weston and the wider health and care system. This will include looking at the future model of urgent and emergency care in Weston and the surrounding areas. For more information, visit www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk.

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: 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: How is the closure affecting primary and community care services in North Somerset?

A: There has been no increase in demand for primary and community care services. Our partners have been involved in all the contingency planning and there are plans in place to support the needs of these patients locally if needed.

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

Q: How do 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.

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 where children will receive safe, appropriate and specialised care, 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: 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.

We have a clear operating procedure in place for ensuring safe management of attending patients between 10pm-8am.

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.