

18 December 2020

An open letter to the people of Norfolk from local health leaders

To the people of Norfolk

With the world facing its biggest health emergency in living memory, we have come together to speak to you jointly in a way that we have never done so before. Today, as we address you with frankness and honesty, we ask of you one thing – that you think very carefully about your Christmas plans.

The emergence of COVID-19 has confronted our National Health Service and its partners with its biggest challenge for generations. Our health and social care colleagues have risen admirably to meet that challenge and continue to do so, despite the incredible strain the virus has placed upon our staff and resources.

However, this is not a quick win situation. Despite this incredible hard work, infection rates continue to rise and this Christmas – let's be candid - we have a monumental challenge on our hands. A challenge that can only be won by each of us making further sacrifice.

Our current infection rate (123 cases per 100,000 people) is more than double where we found ourselves at the start of October (47 cases per 100,000 people). At the beginning of September, there were just 8 cases per 100,000 people. If this current trajectory continues, there will be a significant impact and the situation will go on for much longer.

Sadly, we no longer have the capacity to lower our guard or lessen our resolve over the festive period. We must continue to live with caution and follow guidance fully. We therefore ask that you think carefully about your Christmas plans. As Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty has already told the nation, one of the best ways to fight this virus is to limit contact with other people, so we ask that you choose your Christmas bubble wisely and stick with that bubble. We also ask that you think twice before seeing your elderly or vulnerable relative. This is on top of those things we already do well, such as washing hands, wearing a mask and social distancing.

We do not offer this advice lightly – Christmas gatherings are, of course, very special and personal celebrations. However, this is an extraordinary year. We know our health service would be under significant pressure if cases continue to rise in January.

Our message today is clear - Norfolk needs you. It needs you to make the right choice this Christmas and live within the guidelines.

Thank you

Signed by:

NHS Norfolk and Waveney CCG:

Dr Anoop Dhesi, Chair

Melanie Craig, Chief Officer

Queen Elizabeth Hospital King's Lynn NHS Foundation Trust:

Dr Frankie Swords, Medical Director
Caroline Shaw, Chief Executive

James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:

Dr Hazel Stuart, Medical Director
Anna Hills, Chief Executive

Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust:

Professor Erika Denton, Medical Director
Sam Higginson, Chief Executive

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust:

Dr Daniel Dalton, Chief Medical Officer
Jonathan Warren, Chief Executive

Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust:

Dr Venu Harilal, Medical Director
Josie Spencer, Chief Executive

East Coast Community Healthcare CIC:

Jonathan Williams, Chief Executive

Norfolk County Council:

Louise Smith, Director of Public Health