



The Consumer Healthcare Association



October 2020

A clinical consensus statement on self care COVID-19 update

Self care comprises the actions that individuals take for themselves, on behalf of and with others in order to develop, protect, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing or wellness.

Self care has played an important role during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Government's initial pandemic 'stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives' message was one of self care. It connected an individual's responsibility to self care with caring for their family, the wider community and the NHS. Moreover, the NHS has driven a digital first approach during the outbreak which has both supported and encouraged greater self care.

The benefits of self care are wide-reaching, interlinked, and highly relevant in the current healthcare climate:

- **Self care empowers people:** it allows people to take ownership of their health by recognising the symptoms of self-treatable conditions and how to act on them to stay well when experiencing minor illnesses.
- **Self care reduces demand on the NHS:** it has an important role in minimising unnecessary GP appointments and A&E attendances for minor illnesses, freeing up healthcare professionals' time to dedicate towards people who are in greater need of their expertise.
- **Self care reduces health inequalities:** where there are wider social determinants impacting on an individual's health, there is a greater need to empower them to know how to take care of themselves, as well as how, where and when to access advice.
- **Self care improves health outcomes:** by equipping people with the knowledge to take greater care of themselves and freeing up healthcare professionals' time, self care can play a significant role in driving improvements in population health.

As the lockdown restrictions ease and healthcare services begin to normalise, there is a unique opportunity to embed self care behaviours into the NHS and people's lives.

During the pandemic many people with self-treatable conditions have not been able to visit a GP in the traditional manner, so have learnt – or at least practised – self care behaviours instead. Where it is appropriate, continuing this self care behaviour should be encouraged through the pandemic era and beyond. This will help manage the backlog of demand from people that have been unable to access healthcare services over recent weeks, and ensure everyone receives the right care in the right setting at the right time.

Recommendations

To truly deliver the benefits that self care can bring, a wholesale cultural shift is needed. Both the public's perception of health and wellbeing, and healthcare professionals' perceptions of the role they can play need to change.

We support the call for a national strategy for self care and the recommendations in the [Building clinical consensus](#) roundtable report, updated in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and set out below.

We are committed to playing our part, both individually and collectively, to support the development of policies to encourage self care for self-treatable conditions.

1. The Department of Health and Social Care should develop a national self care strategy
2. NHS England & Improvement should build on the successful Community Pharmacy Consultation Service and explore additional pathways to access this service, such as the implementation of self care recommendation prescriptions, to support GPs and other healthcare professionals to appropriately refer patients to self care
3. Primary Care Networks should consider ways to improve self care in their local populations as part of the development of their network across their local health system
4. NHS England & Improvement should enable community pharmacists to refer people directly to other healthcare professionals where self care is not appropriate, enhancing the role of pharmacists as a first port of call for healthcare advice
5. NHS England & Improvement should accelerate efforts to enable community pharmacists to populate medical records and give them full integration and interoperability of IT systems as part of local health and care records (LHCR) partnerships, and promote national support for such data sharing agreements
6. The Government should promote a system-wide approach to improving health literacy, including working with royal colleges to include self care modules in healthcare professionals' training curricula and Continuing Professional Development; and in the national curriculum for primary and secondary age children, in a way that is sustainable for schools to deliver
7. NHSX should evaluate the use of technologies that have been developed during the COVID-19 pandemic and develop them to cover a wider range of minor ailments to promote self care and manage demand on the NHS

Please contact PAGB, the consumer healthcare association on selfcare@pagb.co.uk to share any feedback or for additional information.