

Coronavirus – main points from today's briefing

Today the numbers are 1563 positive cases of coronavirus in Scotland, with 47 patients who have died.

During the daily briefing from St Andrew's House, the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, announced that in addition to elective surgery such as hip and knee replacements being postponed for now, the various screening programmes which the NHS runs will be put on hold.

It means that no new patients will be invited for screening until further notice.

Results for those who have recently been screened or who have completed and returned home test kits will be processed.

The government hopes that this will free healthcare staff to work in other areas including COVID-19 laboratory testing and covering for colleagues who are unwell or self-isolating.

Since Saturday evening around 5,000 medical students and former NHS workers have volunteered on the Scotland Cares website. The First Minister thanked those volunteers and pointed anyone else to the readyscotland.org website.

The government has taken steps to begin converting The Scottish Events Campus in Glasgow into an NHS hospital, and has appointed John Young as Chief Executive. Health Secretary

Jeane Freeman said that she has enlisted the help of the Army in planning this facility which will offer 300 beds in about a fortnight's time ultimately with capacity for around 1000.

The Chief Medical Officer Dr Catherine Calderwood said that she estimates that around 17-20% of the NHS workforce may be off work at any one time due to the pandemic.

We asked whether any checks are being put in place at ports and airports such as thermal imaging cameras. The First Minister said this was not on the cards, and the CMO confirmed that this might result in some false reassurance as there are more symptoms than just a raised temperature. The advice is that these checks are not reliable.

The CMO said: "We have considered this very carefully some time ago when there were reports of some countries using thermal imaging or temperature checks at borders. The fever that comes with coronavirus is not in everyone, so the difficulty is that you can be falsely reassured by someone's temperature being normal but they have coronavirus.

"The other issue is that you can pick up a whole lot of different conditions which give somebody a fever. Of course with our health service being as it is where we are trying to protect the capacity of the NHS, we would then have lots of people potentially contacting them, although they are not very unwell, but they have a high temperature.

"The increased demand on the health service is something we are trying to avoid. All of these tests we want to be both sensitive and specific. Unfortunately a raised temperature is neither."

The paused programmes are as follows:

Breast Screening (mammograms)

Cervical Screening (smear tests)

Bowel Screening (home test kits)

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA)

Screening (ultrasound of abdomen) Diabetic Retinopathy (Eye) Screening (images taken of the eye).

Pregnancy and Newborn Screening Programmes, including tests offered during pregnancy and just after birth, will continue where logistically practical.

Public Health Minister Joe FitzPatrick said: "This has been a difficult decision to take, but it is important to be aware that these screening programmes are focused on a well population, who are not known to have the conditions they are screened for.

"I want members of the public to be assured we will restart screening programmes as soon as it is safe to do so following clinical advice. When this happens invitations will be re-issued and appointments will be rearranged.

"In the meantime, it is absolutely vital for patients in between screening appointments or awaiting a rescheduled appointment to be aware of any symptoms or signs of the conditions screened for. Anyone having these symptoms should contact their GP practice."

Chief Medical Officer Catherine Calderwood added: "While there are risks to individuals through delayed diagnosis of conditions that these screening programmes would have picked up, these risks need to be weighed up in the context of the pressures on the NHS in Scotland posed by Covid-19 and balanced against other difficult decisions we will need to make.

"The programmes will be potentially fragile due to staff absences and there are clear risks to patients in being asked to attend for screening. The redeployment of staff to work in

other areas is also valuable as part of our national effort to tackle the effects of COVID-19.”

But the advice is equally clear. If you find a lump in your breast or have other symptoms which worry you then you should contact your GP or 111 out of hours in the normal way.