

Digital upgrade for winter health advice

Scots are encouraged to prepare for winter ailments and to use NHS 24's digital tools to help them.

NHS 24 has launched its annual winter health preparedness campaign with Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care. The 'Healthy Know How' campaign helps people manage the usual winter illnesses with advice and helpful reminders ahead of the festive holidays.

The campaign reminds people who rely on repeat prescriptions to check they have enough to last over the holidays and to reorder in plenty of time. People are also reminded that GP opening times will be affected by the festive holidays and to make sure they have cold and flu remedies in, just in case.

As part of this year's campaign NHS 24 is also highlighting the benefits of using NHS digital tools to find accurate and trusted clinical information online for free.

Mr Matheson said: "It is important to remember that services like General Practices and pharmacies will have limited opening times over Christmas and New Year. Planning can help ensure that coughs, colds and minor ailments don't become a problem this winter.

"If winter illnesses do make an unwelcome visit, people can manage symptoms, find out if they need to speak to someone or locate their nearest services by using NHS 24's range of digital resources from the NHS Inform website to the NHS 24 Online app. These digital tools don't replace a healthcare

professional, but they can help people make informed choices with self-care advice for minor illnesses.”

The minister launched the campaign ahead of chairing NHS 24’s Annual Review at Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh. The Annual Review was an opportunity for Mr Matheson and the wider Scottish Government to evaluate NHS 24’s performance and view plans, meet NHS 24 staff, and review the ongoing work to support all NHS services this winter.

This year, GP surgeries will be closed for four days at Christmas (December 23 – 26) and four days again at New Year (December 30 – January 2).

Dr Ron Cook, NHS 24’s Associate Medical Director said most winter coughs and colds can be safely and effectively managed at home, “Roughly a third of the calls to NHS 24’s 111 service result in self-care advice so people can save themselves time by being prepared and, if they do think they need to speak to someone or their symptoms are not improving, they can check our website or app first. It’s important that anyone who relies on regular medication checks they have enough to last the extended holidays – we get a huge number of calls from people who have run out of meds, and no one wants to have to try and find a pharmacy that’s open over the Festive holidays so be prepared to avoid that inconvenience! You should have things like painkillers and cold & flu medicine in the cupboard, just in case. A little preparation can really pay off to make sure that relatively minor health issues don’t cause more of a problem.”

Everything winter health related can be found at <https://www.nhsinform.scot/winter>. NHS 24 has also recently revamped its corporate website (nhs24.scot) and updated the NHS 24 Online app to include more mental wellbeing symptom checkers and the inclusion of defibrillator locations.

