

Official

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To:

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NHS trust and foundation trust chief midwives  
NHS trust and foundation trust HR Directors/Chief  
People Officers  
A&E delivery board chairs  
Primary care network leads  
CCG GP leads  
CCG pharmacy leads  
GP practices  
Community pharmacy practices  
Dental practices  
Optometry practices  
Third sector and independent provider leads

CC:

Regional directors  
Regional chief nurses  
Regional medical directors  
Regional chief midwives

20 March 2021

Dear colleague,

**Women's safety and domestic abuse during COVID-19: a reminder of advice for NHS staff**

In the last few weeks, many women are rightly coming forward to speak about the experiences they face of harassment, intimidation, assault and abuse.

We are writing to you to remind you of the key signs of domestic abuse and the services that are available for women.

Although these services are not exclusively there for or just needed by women, they are essential in supporting women who are in these distressing and sometimes dangerous situations.

Our message to women at this time is simple – the NHS is here for you.

**The signs of domestic abuse**

Domestic violence, also called domestic abuse, includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse in couple relationships or between family members. Domestic violence can happen against anyone, and anybody can be an abuser.

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality or background.

Domestic abuse is not always physical violence. It can also include:

- coercive control and 'gaslighting'
- economic abuse
- online abuse
- threats and intimidation
- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse

The government's [webpage on spotting the signs](#) has a checklist on what to look out for.

### **Public information on domestic abuse**

The NHS website has [advice for the public](#) on spotting the signs of domestic abuse and domestic violence and where to go for help. The NHS also has a [help page](#) for those who have been raped or sexually assaulted.

The Home Office is promoting the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline number **0808 2000 247** and associated online support available at [nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

As part of the campaign, the [Home Office has produced detailed advice](#) for those experiencing domestic abuse and domestic violence.

In addition, [Respect](#) is an anonymous and confidential helpline for men and women who are harming their partners and families. The helpline also takes calls from partners or ex-partners, friends and relatives who are concerned about perpetrators.

NHS staff will find these resources useful in signposting survivors – and perpetrators – to specific support teams.

### **You Are Not Alone campaign**

The Home Office's campaign "You Are Not Alone" encourages people to come forward for support if they are experiencing domestic abuse. A whole suite of materials including social media assets, email signature cards, safeguarding leaflets, animations for Instagram stories and posters and leaflets for your surgery waiting rooms are available to [download online here](#).

Materials in other languages are also available to [download online here](#).

Please use these materials in your places of work.

### **How the public can access help**

If you are worried that a friend, neighbour or loved one is a victim of domestic abuse then you can call the freephone, **24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247** and further information is on the helpline's [dedicated website](#).

If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, you should always call 999.

The Government has a detailed webpage [Domestic abuse: get help during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#) where you can find out how to get help if you or someone you know is

a victim of domestic abuse. In particular, the government pages have translated guidance, welfare benefits and housing advice as well as advice on how to get legal help.

The pages also give details on the domestic abuse code-word scheme. If someone is experiencing domestic abuse and needs immediate help, they can ask for 'ANI' in a participating pharmacy. 'ANI' stands for Action Needed Immediately but also phonetically sounds like the name Annie. If a pharmacy has the 'Ask for ANI' logo on display, it means they're ready to help.

They will offer the person a private space, provide a phone and ask if they need support from the police or other domestic abuse support services.

### **Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)**

SARCs remain open and accessible during COVID-19 to offer non-judgmental advice and support. Victims and survivors will be triaged on contact with the SARC, to ensure safe management during this period. Remote support will be available to support pathways to therapeutic interventions. Forensic examination services will be offered to those that want it, to support a criminal prosecution.

If a patient presents with the signs of sexual assault it is important that the SARC is informed urgently. A directory of local services is available here: [www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364).

### **Resources for NHS staff**

We have launched a comprehensive package of health and wellbeing support to support our NHS people through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Details of the full range of offers is [available online](#).

Standing Together has [published guidance](#) on responding to domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

IRISi has released [guidance for GP Teams](#), including how to enquire about domestic abuse over the phone.

IRISi has also produced guidance on domestic abuse in the [context of end of life care](#) in the COVID-19 pandemic.

AVA has published [guidance for mental health professionals](#).

The Chief Dental Officer has produced [an advice bulletin for dental professionals](#) on spotting the signs of abuse and supporting patients.

### **Resources for NHS managers**

The [Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk in the NHS: Safeguarding Accountability and Assurance Framework](#) sets out the roles and responsibilities of all individuals working in providers of NHS-funded care settings and NHS commissioning organisations. This includes a duty to support victims to ensure they receive timely care and support, whether from the NHS, police or a third sector service. It also sets out the duties to attend to perpetrators.

It is important to remember that domestic abuse and domestic violence do not just affect patients. As an employer, NHS organisations have a legal obligation to assess any risk and support the health and safety and wellness of their employees. NHS Employers has produced two resources to help NHS managers support employees who may be the victims and survivors of domestic abuse and violence:

- [Domestic violence and abuse: supporting NHS staff - is designed to give organisations information about things to include when developing a domestic violence and abuse policy.](#)
- [Dealing with domestic violence: first steps - helps organisations take a step by step approach when looking at how they can support their staff who may be suffering from enduring domestic violence.](#)

As an employer, you can play an important role in reassuring employees that there is help and support available, including online support, helplines, refuges and local support services. The [Government's domestic abuse during COVID-19 employer pack](#) is a useful resource to help you do this.

We encourage you to cascade this information as you see appropriate. It's important that we all ensure that the NHS is taking the right action to identify, safeguard and care for individuals in these very difficult circumstances, and more widely support patients against abuse.

Thank you for your support.



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Director of Sexual Assault  
Referral Centres



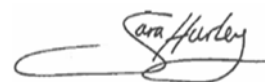
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