

Don't delay seeking medical help because of coronavirus

People living in Wiltshire are being advised not to let worries about coronavirus stop them asking for medical help for themselves or their children if they become ill, have a serious accident or have a concern about their health.

They are also being warned that not seeking medical help for symptoms that could be the early warning signs of serious conditions such as cancer could be putting lives at risk.

The warning comes as new data shows a considerable drop in the number of people coming forward to ask their GP for help and advice during the coronavirus outbreak.

Recent statistics show that, in Bath alone, the total number of weekly referrals from GPs to the Royal United Hospital have fallen from around 2,000 at the beginning of March to 300 at the end of April.

In Swindon, the average number of patients being sent by their GP to the Great Western Hospital for further investigations into symptoms that suggest cancer each week has dropped by more than 200 to 80.

Dr Ruth Grabham, Medical Director at BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire CCG, said the statistics made for worrying reading because the drop in numbers "is not because people are not experiencing symptoms."

"While it may seem that coronavirus has put a stop to most aspects of everyday life, the one thing it hasn't stopped is what's going on inside our bodies," she says. "Now more than ever, we need to pay attention to anything that isn't normal and seek help early on.

"For example, if you notice blood when going to the toilet, or if you've found a lump that wasn't there previously, or if you've just noticed something odd that is causing you to worry, you need to speak to your GP.

"Should the symptom be the early warning sign of something serious like cancer, that delay in seeking help could have serious implications for how successful possible treatments may be."

Although GP practices across the region have adopted new ways of working, such as establishing isolated clinics for potential coronavirus patients, the practices themselves are still open to offer care, treatment, advice and peace-of-mind.

The same also goes for emergency departments at the three hospitals in Bath, Swindon and Salisbury, all of which continue to be open 24 hours a day for people with a genuine and life-threatening health concern.

Additionally, all healthcare facilities in the region, as well as those elsewhere in the country, have put in place stringent infection control measures to ensure that the risk of contracting coronavirus while visiting a hospital or GP surgery remains low.

- Details of which services continue to open, as well as how to get in contact, can be found online by visiting www.bswccg.nhs.uk
- For information about local hospital services visit <https://www.ruh.nhs.uk/>, www.gwh.nhs.uk or www.salisbury.nhs.uk
- Further information on how to stay well throughout the coronavirus outbreak can be found at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19.