

Winter resilience is coming with extra beds, Choose Well and My Winter Health Plan

Mr Gething outlined a number of positive actions aimed at easing the pressures on hospitals including an increase in available bed capacity and the strengthening of emergency ambulatory care services to enable patients with specific conditions to be treated without needing to stay in hospital overnight.

The positive steps were announced as NHS Wales Chief Executive Dr Andrew Goodall called on people to Choose Well and make the right decisions of where to get advice and treatment if they are unwell to help ease pressure on GPs and hospital emergency departments.

Dr Goodall also launched a new initiative, My Winter Health Plan, aimed at helping people with long-term physical or mental health conditions provide vital information for visiting health professionals to allow more people to be seen and treated at home and avoid unnecessary trips to A&E.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

“Winter is always a challenging time for our health and social care services and hard-working staff here in Wales, as it is across the UK.

“A wide range of positive actions are planned to further improve local and national resilience, including an increase in available bed capacity both in hospital and in the community to mitigate against the anticipated rise in the number of patients with multiple conditions who require admission to hospital over winter.

“As last year, we will see the strengthening of emergency ambulatory care services to enable patients with specific conditions to be treated without needing to stay in hospital overnight wherever possible.

“Other actions taken to improve resilience this winter include strengthening seven-day working; increasing senior decision-making at the hospital front door; extending working hours; additional support for out-of-hours services and care homes; improved use of social workers in hospitals and greater use of pharmacy support.

NHS Wales Chief Executive Dr Andrew Goodall said:

“Making the right choice of which services and treatments will save you time and make sure you and your family get the right care

quickly. I know NHS staff will be working hard this winter. Choose well to help them help you.”

Dr Goodall said 10,000 My Winter Health Plans, which also contain winter health and care tips, are also being distributed by health boards, local authorities and a number of key organisations including Age Cymru.

He said:

“The aim of My Winter Health Plan is to provide people with chronic conditions, or their carers, with a form that they can display on their fridge or in an easy to see part of their home. If they then receive a home visit in an emergency from a health and care professional, family member or neighbour, that person will have useful key information to help them make a more informed decision on what action to take. It is anticipated that this will help avoid unnecessary journeys to hospital.”

Dr Goodall reminded people that everybody can help ease winter pressures by using the wide range of health and care professionals in communities for advice and treatment when they are unwell.

“Community pharmacists can advise you and your family on minor ailments, coughs or colds. They can offer expert advice, over-the-counter medicines and prescriptions and, if needed, advise whether you need to see your GP,” said Dr Goodall.

“By making this vital choice you can often be seen and treated more quickly, saving you time and freeing up GPs and hospital A&E departments for those who really need them.

“For persistent symptoms, infections or if your child has a fever, go and see your GP.

“If it isn’t a life-threatening emergency but you aren’t sure where to go, contact NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47 or go to www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk for the Symptom Checker.

“A&E is for people who are very sick or badly injured and unless this is the case you will get the right care quicker by choosing well. Even if the A&E is closer, it is not the best place to go to for most health problems.

“There is lots we can all do, like ensuring prescriptions are ordered in advance. Friends and relatives of older people can help by checking in on them and making sure they are keeping their homes warm – 18-21C – to prevent any existing health problems getting worse.”