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NHS England and NHS  
Improvement  
Skipton House  
80 London Road  
London  
SE1 6LH

To:  
NHS trust and foundation trust chief nurses  
NHS trust and foundation trust medical directors  
NHS trust and foundation trust chief midwives  
A&E delivery board chairs  
Primary care network leads  
CCG GP leads  
CCG pharmacy leads  
Third sector and independent provider leads

CC:  
Regional directors  
Regional chief nurses  
Regional medical directors  
Regional chief midwives

15 May 2020

Dear colleague,

### **Domestic abuse during COVID-19: a reminder of advice for NHS staff**

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. During the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic abuse charities and other organisations are reporting an increase in cases:

- General online domestic abuse searches have increased by 352.5%
- Support lines and web chat activity has increased by 53.9% and 70.4% respectively.
- There has been a substantial rise in self-referrals to ChildLine
- An increase of up to 50% in Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) domestic abuse referrals

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

The NHS website has [advice online for the public](#) on spotting the signs for 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 have launched a national campaign to raise awareness of the dedicated support available. The campaign will highlight that isolation rules do not apply in the case of domestic abuse and that police response and support services remain available.



The Home Office is promoting the freephone 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Helpline number is **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. A [webchat service](#) is available.

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

### **Resources for NHS staff**

The DHSC website has a [resource that looks at how health professionals](#) can support adults and young people over 16, and dependent children, who are experiencing domestic abuse. The document helps health staff to identify potential victims, initiate sensitive routine enquiry, respond effectively to disclosures of abuse.

Standing Together have [published guidance](#) for acute health professionals on responding to domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

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

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

### **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 the duties to support perpetrators.

It is important to remember that domestic abuse and domestic violence does 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 enduring domestic violence.](#)

## **Sexual Assault Referral Centers (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).

We appreciate this is a difficult time and how hard everyone is working. Please cascade this information as you see appropriate, so we can all ensure that the NHS is taking the right action to identify, safeguard and care for individuals in these very difficult circumstances.

If you have any questions, please email [England.Safeguarding@nhs.net](mailto:England.Safeguarding@nhs.net)

Thank you for your support.



Kate Davies CBE  
Director of Health and Justice, Armed Forces  
and Sexual Assault Referral Centres  
NHS England and NHS Improvement



Kenny Gibson  
National Head of Safeguarding  
NHS England and NHS  
Improvement