# NHS under pressure as pharmacies launch new online services



The NHS is currently facing significant challenges as it deals with a surge of winter viruses, including flu, COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and norovirus, collectively referred to as a ‘quademic’. Compounding this issue is a backlog of appointments that has resulted in the average wait time for patients reaching approximately 14 weeks.

Amid this ongoing healthcare strain, pharmacies throughout the UK have stepped up to relieve some of the pressures. The Pharmacy First scheme, initiated in January of the previous year, has already proven to be beneficial for the over 6.3 million patients awaiting treatment. This initiative allows patients experiencing specific conditions to receive care directly from pharmacies, bypassing the need for a GP appointment.

In a further effort to alleviate the burden on the NHS, Well Pharmacy has recently launched its Online Doctor service. This new service enables patients to access medical advice and treatment for 16 additional conditions, aimed at reducing the number of individuals who might otherwise require in-person consultations.

George Sandhu of Well Pharmacy stated, “To help both yourself, and the NHS, it is worth being aware of these 16 areas that you can talk to our free Online Doctor service about.” He highlighted that this service may offer a more convenient alternative to traditional GP appointments and also affords patients a private means to discuss sensitive health issues, such as erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation.

The Online Doctor service covers a range of conditions including erectile dysfunction, which affects approximately 4.3 million men in the UK, hair loss treatments for the 6.5 million men who experience male pattern baldness by age 50, and treatments for premature ejaculation, which may impact between 20 to 30% of men. Contraceptive options, including emergency contraception, are also within its scope, responding to a need identified through research indicating that many women hesitate to approach pharmacists about such issues.

Additional health conditions that can be managed through the service include asthma, migraines, allergies affecting 21 million individuals, and period delay for women, as well as solutions for jet lag and malaria prophylactics for travellers. The service also offers treatments for urinary tract infections, increasing in severity with age, and sexually transmitted infections, which have risen by 4.7% in reported diagnoses in the past year.

Moreover, facial hair removal and acne treatments, which contribute to millions of primary care visits annually, can also be accessed. The Online Doctor service aims to provide discreet consultations where patients can select their medications through an online platform, significantly easing the pressure on already overwhelmed GP practices.

Finally, the service addresses smoking cessation, with nearly two-thirds of smokers in England expressing a desire to quit, though success rates remain low. The Online Doctor will facilitate access to prescription medications designed to assist in quitting.

The overall intention behind these initiatives is to enhance patient access to essential healthcare while alleviating some of the pressure on the NHS during a challenging period.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2025/01/15/jbqk-j15.html> - This article corroborates the NHS's current challenges with a surge of winter viruses, including flu, COVID-19, RSV, and norovirus, which are collectively referred to as a 'quademic'. It highlights the strain on healthcare services and the resulting delays in elective care.
* <https://www.nhsconfed.org/articles/there-geographic-variation-spread-seasonal-viruses> - This article supports the notion of a challenging winter for the NHS due to seasonal viruses, discussing geographic variations in virus spread and the impact on NHS services.
* <https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/news/no-let-up-for-nhs-trusts-as-flu-cases-surge> - This piece provides further evidence of the ongoing pressure on NHS trusts due to flu and other winter viruses, emphasizing the unrelenting demand on healthcare services.
* <https://www.vacourts.gov/courts/scv/rulesofcourt.pdf> - Although unrelated to the NHS or health services, this document is included as it was part of the search results. However, it does not support any claims in the article.
* <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/11/15/2024-25534/negative-option-rule> - This document does not relate to the NHS or the specific health challenges mentioned in the article. It pertains to FTC regulations and is not relevant to the topic.