



Three Shires Medical Practice Newsletter

Autumn 2025

Practice Update

Welcome to this Autumn edition. As always at this time of year we have been busy preparing for the Flu and COVID season. This year's season nationally kicks off on 1st October, once again to ensure that the vaccines are maximally effective over the main part of the year when viruses circulate.

However, preparation began in earnest in July working with the third party that supplies the platform for booking patients into their appointments. For those patients eligible, you will already have started to receive your invite to secure an appointment and for those patients that do not have a mobile registered with the practice, you will be receiving a call over the coming weeks to book you into an appointment.

Please note: the rules on who can have the COVID vaccine have changed this year. Some people who had the COVID vaccine last year, will not be able to have it this year.

Who can get the vaccines? See also <https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/>

(Information correct on 13/08/2025, but may change)

Patient group	Covid vaccine	Flu vaccine
Aged 75+	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
Aged 65–74	✗ No	✓ Yes
Immuno-compromised (people with a weaker immune system) aged 6 months+	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
People aged 18 to 74 yrs with clinical risks (diabetes, COPD, etc.)	✗ No	✓ Yes
Pregnant women	✗ No	✓ Yes
Residents in a care home for older adults	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
Frontline and care home staff	✗ No	✓ Yes
Carers, household contacts of immuno-compromised people, housebound patients	✗ No	✓ Yes

Where can I have my vaccine?

We will continue to offer appointments at Marshfield Community Centre for COVID and Flu vaccinations (given together if eligible) but in addition you can go to any GP Practice in our network (Network4 PCN)

These are:

- Christchurch Family Medical Practice (Downend)
- The Willow Surgery (Downend)
- The Orchard Medical Centre
- Leap Valley Surgery
- Abbotswood Surgery

Appointments will be available on weekdays and weekends, including Saturdays and Sundays with a small number of clinics during the week at our local surgeries in Colerne, Wick and Pucklechurch. We will be running a larger Flu only clinic in Pucklechurch on Saturday 25th October 2025.

GP practices are responsible for offering (nasal) flu vaccination for all pre-school 2–3-year-olds, children at risk not vaccinated at school and we will call families in, likely from mid-October when we have the vaccine available. We are also planning for housebound people and care home visits, and the Practice will be in touch with those care homes and housebound patients to arrange those vaccinations; there is no need to contact the surgery, we will be in touch with dates once agreed.

At the time of writing we don't have any further information that we can share with you as to what the new GP contract will offer GP practices. As mentioned in previous newsletters and at our patient group meetings, we await the detail in the hope that this will help practices like ourselves to continue to offer the care and service that we strive hard to maintain and as patients you deserve locally! Our new Website will be live in early October which will allow more rapid updates for you and improved functionality and readability.

We thank you all for your support during these challenging times.

Finally, our staff do get ill, we understand the frustration that this causes when appointments have to be cancelled at short notice; however, this is not something we can anticipate so please be kind to our reception teams should they have to cancel and rearrange your appointment.

SCAM Alert

Beware of SCAM text or email messages which falsely claim to be from the Department for Work and Pensions, about the Winter Heating allowance. These messages are scams. You do not need to apply for a winter fuel payment. If you are eligible, the payment will be made automatically.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a serious and chronic condition where blood glucose levels are too high. This happens when the body doesn't produce enough insulin, doesn't use insulin efficiently or fails to produce any insulin at all. There are two main types of diabetes, type 1 and type 2, and a number of much less common types such as gestational diabetes.

In type 1 diabetes the pancreas fails to produce enough, or any, insulin. In type 2 diabetes, the pancreas is not at fault – enough insulin is being produced but the cells in the body are 'resistant', i.e. they fail to respond to insulin by allowing the glucose to enter them. Hence there is a dangerous build-up of sugar (glucose) in the blood stream.

In every type of diabetes, glucose builds up in our blood. We all need glucose as it is what gives us energy. When we eat, our bodies break down the carbohydrates we consume and convert it into glucose which is released into our blood. Insulin is a hormone made in our pancreas and it is insulin that allows the glucose in our blood to enter our cells to fuel our bodies. The pancreas senses when glucose has entered the bloodstream and then releases the right amount of insulin. If you have diabetes, this system doesn't work properly or for some people doesn't work at all.

Common symptoms of diabetes include:

- Going to the toilet a lot, particularly at night,
- Continuous thirst,
- More than usual tiredness,
- Weight loss,
- Blurred vision and/or
- A longer healing process for cuts and bruises.

Diagnosis of diabetes is achieved through a blood test, which measures blood glucose levels. The blood test can show if you have developed diabetes, and if you are at risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

Left untreated, high levels of glucose in our blood can seriously damage many parts of our bodies including the brain, eyes, heart, kidneys, legs, and feet. With the right treatment and care, the risk of developing these problems can be considerably reduced.

Treatment for diabetes is about keeping blood glucose levels within a safe range. Eating healthily, and being as active as possible, losing weight, stopping smoking, and having regular health checks contributes to achieving safe glucose levels. For type 1 diabetics it will probably be essential to take insulin and check blood sugar levels regularly.

Treatment for type 2 diabetics starts with diet, and proceeds to tablets if diet alone is not enough.

Some people will have a blood sugar level higher than usual but not high enough for a diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes. This is called prediabetes.

Prediabetes doesn't have any symptoms but if you are found after a blood test to be prediabetic, even small amounts of weight loss if you are overweight will reduce the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, as will eating a healthy balanced diet and trying to be more physically active.

For more helpful information and advice, the Diabetes UK website is particularly helpful, www.diabetes.org.uk phone number 0345 123 2399. There is a monthly group meeting for people living with Type 2 diabetes and the contact for that is via the Taunton office on 01823 448 260.

Measles Mumps and Rubella (MMR) Vaccination

Measles, mumps, and rubella, (known as German Measles) are all viral illnesses spread by coughs and sneezes and for measles even passing contact with an infected person. There is no treatment or cure for any of these illnesses. Symptoms include fever and rash with measles and swollen glands with mumps.

Measles can be serious. Recent deaths of two children in the UK have prompted Department of Health encouragement for improved take up of the MMR vaccination. Complications can result from each of these conditions which can be avoided if the MMR vaccination is taken. Rates of childhood vaccination have declined in recent years. Almost 3,000 cases of measles were recorded in 2024, the highest number since 2012.

The MMR vaccination protects you against measles, mumps and rubella and is the safest and most effective way of ensuring your resistance to these infections. Your children should be offered two doses of MMR, the first just after the first birthday and the second dose at eighteen months old. If as an older child, teenager, or young adult you have had no vaccination at all or you have had just one dose, it would be wise to follow this up with your local surgery. It is worth being aware that there has been an increase in the development of measles amongst university students recently in parts of the UK.

The combined MMR vaccine has been safely protecting children, younger and older people for many years since it was introduced in 1988. (People born before 1970 are likely to have had all three of these infections; from 1970 there were individual single vaccinations for measles and rubella.) Much research and study has been undertaken to ensure that the MMR vaccine is safe and effective. Side effects from the vaccine do not affect everyone and if they occur, they will last for two or three days. It is never too late to have the MMR vaccination if you haven't had the two doses!!

Patient Participation Group (PPG)

Our PPG held its seventh Annual General Meeting in June. We had an update on the issues facing our GP Practice and how the new 10 year NHS plan might affect the Practice going forward. Sadly, the financial situation for the Practice seems to be no clearer. The PPG and the Friends of Three Shires were thanked for the money the Practice has received for purchase of essential equipment which has enabled the Practice to continue running as smoothly as possible. It was agreed that the Friends would continue fundraising until the financial situation becomes clearer. A representative from Healthwatch gave a talk about patient satisfaction with primary health care. Healthwatch are our local champions for health and social care and are keen to hear peoples' experience of local health and social care services. If there are any issues that you would like us to take to future PPG meetings, please contact us on 4patientparticipation@gmail.com or leave a letter addressed to the PPG at Pucklechurch surgery.

Friends of Three Shires

We would like to say a big THANK YOU to Jonathan Payne and Downend Round Table for the £1,700 they have given towards the new defibrillator at Pucklechurch surgery. Thanks too, to family and friends for donations given in tribute to and in memory of Mr Roger Payne who passed away earlier this year.



More than £20,000 has been raised so far to buy key items of equipment. We hope to hold a few more fundraising events in the coming months.

If you would still like to contribute, we have a Lloyds bank account whose details are, sort code 30 99 50 account number 54449863; cheques should be made payable to Friends of Three Shires and you can also use the QR code.

A huge THANK YOU from the Practice partners and all the staff at each of our surgery sites and from the PPG and the Friends group for your amazing kindness and generosity in supporting the work of Three Shires Medical Practice.

NHS Prescription Charges and Other Practice Fees

As many of you will know, the NHS prescription charge for the year until April 2026, is £9.90 per item. If you haven't already considered this, you might like to think about applying for a Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC). You can buy a PPC which covers all prescriptions for 3 months for £32.05 or for 12 months £114.50. So, if you need more than 4 items of medication over a 3 month period or more than 13 items of medication in a 12 month period, applying for a prepayment certificate is a cheaper way to pay for your medication.

If you would like to purchase a prepayment certificate online, go to <https://buy-prescription-prepayment-certificate.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/start> or www.gov.uk/get-a-ppc or you could telephone 0300 330 1341.

Prescriptions are free for:

- Children under the age of 16,
- Students in full time education aged 16, 17 or 18,
- People aged 60 and over.

Prescriptions are also free for patients who have:

- A valid cancer patient exemption certificate
- A valid maternity exemption certificate
- A valid medical exemption certificate
- A valid PPC
- A valid war pension exemption certificate
- A valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate
- A valid HC2 certificate

If you receive Income Support or Income Related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Based Jobseekers Allowance or Pension Guarantee Credit your prescription should be free.

If you are on Hormone Replacement Therapy it is worth checking to see if the medication you are taking, is covered by a PPC.

The prescription charge is a contribution to the NHS; it's not a payment to your Practice; it bears no relation to the real cost of the item of medication.

There are items that the Practice does charge for. A list of the certificates, letters, forms and reports that we charge for and the amounts charged can be found at the base of the front page of the Practice website www.threeshiresmedical.co.uk under prescription charges and private fees.

The Memory Café

Our local Memory Café continues to meet at Doynton Village Hall on the first Thursday of each month from 2.00pm until 4.00pm. It continues to be a relaxed and informal free drop in café providing support for people living with a dementia along with a family member, friend, or carer. Each month the café has a theme; in September that will be Last Night of the Proms, in October it will be harvest with a visit from Emersons Green Primary School choir, in November we're planning indoor games and bingo and in December Christmas and a performance from our Ukelele Group, the Strummers.

Helen Williams on 07853 179721 is our volunteer's coordinator and the point of contact for any new or potential volunteers.

The NHS 10 Year Plan

The NHS 10 Year Plan was published in July 2025. It offers a vision to develop the NHS into a more responsive, preventative and more patient centred service over the next ten years.

The plan has three key strands:

- Moving care from hospitals to the community,
- Transferring to digital systems
- Prioritising prevention over treatment.

The overall aim is to achieve better care wherever people live, better value for money for taxpayers, and improved patient and staff involvement. A summary of the plan and the full plan can be found at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-term-plan/>

NHS GP Patient Survey 2025

The NHS GP Patient Survey is an independent national survey run by IPSOS for NHS England. Locally, 260 surveys were sent out to Three Shires patients and there were 116 responses. We were pleased, grateful and somewhat relieved to have achieved some of the high scores from patients who responded to the survey given the issues that the Practice has faced particularly over the past two years.

93% of responders said they found it easy to get through to the Practice on the telephone, the national average was 53% Our scores were higher than average as far as ease of access to the Practice via our website and the NHS app, though we still hope to achieve some improvement here.

94% of responders found our reception and administrative staff helpful compared with the national average of 83%. 88% described experience of contacts with their GP as good; the national figure was 70%.

Our appointment system scored highly compared with the national average as did the contacts with all our health care professionals where we scored over 90% in several categories including 99% having confidence in the health care professional they saw and 99% feeling that their needs were met during their appointment.

88% of responders described their overall experience of the Practice as good compared with the national average of 75%.

While it is heartening to see the results of this year's survey, this is not a time for complacency. We will continue to work hard to provide the best possible services that we can to our Three Shires patients and where there are areas requiring improvement, we will seek ways of making those improvements.

If you would like more detailed information about the survey, search GP Patient survey for their website.

The Care Quality Commission

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and social care in England. The CQC aims to ensure that health and social care services provide people with safe, compassionate, high quality care and if necessary, encourage and where essential, require care services to improve. (The CQC does not handle individual complaints which are picked up by service providers' own comments and complaints procedures.)

The CQC:

- Registers providers of health and social care services,
- Monitors, inspects and gives a rating to services,
- Acts to protect service users
- Speaks out about quality health and social care issues.

The CQC regulate the activities of hospitals, GP Practices, dental practices, ambulance services, nursing and residential care homes and home care providing agencies.

Five questions are asked of every service:

- Is it safe? Are service users protected from abuse and avoidable harm?
- Is it effective? Does the care treatment and support a service user receives, help to maintain that person's quality of life?
- Is it Caring? Is the service user treated with kindness, compassion, dignity and respect?
- Is it responsive? Does the service meet the needs of the service user?
- Is it well led? Do the leaders / managers of the service ensure that high quality care is provided?

CQC inspectors speak with managers and staff providing the services, inspect records such as staff training and staff supervision and speak with service users and carers.

The CQC publish their inspection reports on their website; in those reports they rate the inspected service as one of the following, outstanding, good, requiring improvement or inadequate.

Depending upon how serious problems are that an inspection discovers, the CQC may give the service provider:

- A notice of what they have to do and by when,
- Issue a caution, a fine and/or proceed to prosecution,
- Place limits on the activities of the care provider,
- Place a care provider under special measures with a timetable for improvement.

If the CQC find that a service provider is failing to achieve the improvement that is required, they may deregister the service.

The Care Quality Commission can be contacted on 03000 616161 or by email enquiries@cqc.org.uk see the website www.cqc.org.uk or write to Care Quality Commission

Citygate

Gallowgate

Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 4PA