

The next stages in a major Covid-19 action plan aimed at ensuring local patients, staff and communities are guaranteed first class health care and support have been outlined by hospital leaders today.

The far reaching plan builds on work already in place at the Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust and is aimed at reassuring people that everything possible is being done to make sure they are kept safe and well during the current Covid-19 outbreak.

There are four main strands to the plan:

- To reduce the number of people – patients, visitors and staff – on hospital sites
- To increase and enhance the RBH’s capacity to treat patients
- To reduce demand so the focus is on the patients most in need of help
- To look after hard working staff and make sure they have the equipment and facilities they need

Measures have already been put in place to tackle these critically important areas.

- Many more people are being offered virtual outpatient clinic appointments to receive healthcare over the phone or via a laptop.
- Visitors have been restricted to one per patient per day.
- The hospital layout has been revised to establish separate zones to deal with the differing needs of patients and keep everyone safe
- Intensive care capacity has increased from 14 to 34 beds
- Elective surgery has been suspended to free up time for key staff to be retrained in other more urgent areas of work

Now the next phase of the action plan is being implemented and this will mean more changes to the way the hospital works and the way patients and visitors will be asked to operate.

In a bid to further reduce the number of people coming on to the hospital site, some services may be deferred, and other services may be moved to alternative private hospital settings. Children under the age of 12 will no longer be able to go to the RBH as visitors.

To increase capacity to deal with Covid 19 patients, there are plans to increase intensive care beds to 56 and health managers are in talks with the independent sector to move urgent surgery to private hospitals.

Demand in A&E has seen a fall recently but more needs to be done to ease the pressure on staff and an 'Ask A&E' online helpline service is being explored.

The welfare of staff is paramount in the action plan and senior management teams are looking at what more can be offered to ease the unprecedented demands facing all those working in the hospital – the clinicians and vital back up and support teams like cleaners, porters and admin employees.

Trust Chief Executive Steve McManus, said: “Whilst we’re all in very new territory with this virus we have a huge amount of tried and tested experience of planning for and dealing with major outbreaks like this. There are national and regional systems in place to support us and this, coupled with the work we’re doing at the Trust, is all aimed at keeping everyone safe and making sure we can sustain this level of care for the period of this outbreak.

“We all know now that this is a marathon, not a sprint, and it’s crucial we plan and operate in a careful, measured way over the next few weeks and months so our resources, both staff, equipment and facilities, are able to continue providing exceptional standards of care.

“We have amazing staff with many, many years of expertise, experience and knowledge behind them and I want people to know they are in safe hands.

“This incredible wealth of healthcare expertise is being enhanced by the really outstanding support from our local communities and partners and we can’t thank them enough for all their on-going support,” he said.

“We recognise we’re asking a lot of people, often at very difficult times in their lives when they are unwell or wanting to be with people who are ill. Our staff too are facing all sorts of difficult day-to-day issues and this is why the support and understanding we offer to each other is so important.

“With this in mind, I really do hope people will appreciate why we’ve had to take some of the decisions we have taken, for example around visiting family and loved ones in hospital. I know this will be extremely hard for some people but we can’t say it enough - If we are to successfully deal with this virus, stop its spread, treat those affected and free up the hospital’s resources to do so, then we have to take these sort of serious steps now.

“So my message to them is please think again just how much they really do need to make that visit. Can they keep in touch with their loved one over the phone for now? By choosing not to come into the building they are doing a huge amount to help our staff,” he added.