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Pressure on Epsom Hospital at boiling point?

13 June 2023

Visits to emergency departments (EDs) rocketed on Monday, with more people coming through the doors than ever before. More than 1,250 people went to one of St George's, Epsom and St Helier's three EDs – a rise on the previous record of 1,170, and a huge increase on a typical day of about 800 attendances.

It comes just hours before hundreds of junior doctors prepare to strike across the hospitals group – prompting fears of a "double whammy" of pressures.

ED attendances on Monday 12 June were as follows:

- St George's: 580
- Epsom and St Helier: 674
- Kingston: 533
- Croydon: 622

Croydon and Kingston hospitals also experienced very high demand and easily surpassed their previous highest number of attendances.

Kingston Hospital set a new record seeing more than 530 people visiting its emergency department in one day, including 78 ambulances and 455 walk-ins.

Croydon University Hospital saw 622 unwell patients needing to see an emergency care consultant – 16% above the previous busiest summer day on record on 17 June 2021.

Dr **Richard Jennings**, Group Chief Medical Officer at St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, said: "We have never been busier, and with the upcoming strikes it's going to be a very challenging week.

"We're here, as always, for those who need us. But now more than ever, we need the public's support in those cases where it is not an emergency. NHS 111 online should be your first port of call in these instances, as it can direct you to where you need to go."

Members of the British Medical Association and Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association will strike for 72 hours from **7am on Wednesday 14 June until 7am on Saturday 17 June.**

This action will impact services at hospitals, and will mean that some appointments, procedures and operations may be postponed to ensure emergency care can be prioritised. Patients will be contacted directly if their appointments are rescheduled, and should continue to come forward for care as normal unless they hear otherwise.

The mercury is expected to remain in the high 20s, and even early 30s, when these strikes start – and will hit hot temperatures once action has finished, too, with the UK Health Security Agency and the Met Office extending their heat-health alert to Monday.

When temperatures rise, more people, especially those in high-risk groups, can suffer from illnesses like heat exhaustion and dehydration, as well as sunburn.

The pollen count has also been very high, and there has been a surge in people visiting EDs with shortness of breath. This might not be anything to worry about, but it is scary and sometimes those who are experiencing it will need medical help. NHS England has this advice for people who are affected.

If you have an underlying respiratory condition, you should contact your GP or asthma nurse as needed – unless it is an emergency, in which case you should call 999 or go to ED immediately.

Everyone should stay safe and well in the hotter weather, and take steps such as: looking out for people who may struggle to keep cool and hydrated, such as elderly relatives or neighbours; keeping windows closed when the room is cooler than outside; and staying hydrated.

You should also stay out of the sun between 11am and 3pm, apply suncream regularly, and wear a hat.

Dr Jennings added: "This weather has undoubtedly contributed to the rise in people – some who are vulnerable and very sick – coming to our emergency departments.

"Help us to prioritise care for those need it the most, and use our services wisely."

If you need urgent medical help use NHS 111 online first, which can direct you to where you need to go. Pharmacies,

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meanwhile, can offer advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, sore throats, and aches and pains.

To find out more about staying safe during hot weather, visit the NHS's website.

St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group

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