Winter Health News

Practice pressures

Staffing and recruitment

We have said a fond farewell to Dr Naveed Ahsan, who has moved south with his family. We are very grateful for all he has contributed to the practice and wish him and his family every happiness for the future.

Dr Madeleine Colmar will begin maternity leave before the festive season, and we send her our very best wishes.

Recruiting another GP continues to be challenging, but we are delighted that a new Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) will be joining our team in December. Our ANP will work alongside our GPs and wider healthcare team to help us continue providing safe and appropriate care for our patients.

Rising winter demand

Winter is always an especially busy time for health services. Cold weather and seasonal illnesses increase demand not only at the practice, but across NHS 24, out-of-hours services, ambulance services and hospitals.

We have a limited number of appointments available each day and, during particularly busy periods, we need to prioritise patients with the most clinically urgent needs. This may sometimes mean that you are offered an appointment at a later date or directed to another healthcare professional or service that is better placed to help you.

Please be assured that **every request for care is taken seriously**, and our team will always aim to help you access the right care as safely and promptly as possible.

Our commitment

We know that delays or changes to the way you access care can sometimes be frustrating or worrying, and we greatly appreciate your patience and understanding.

We continue to work hard to recruit clinicians and make the best use of our wider healthcare team so that services at Keith Health Centre remain **safe, sustainable and responsive to the needs of our patients**.



Working together for safe, appropriate care this winter

As winter approaches, demand rises across health and care services. This newsletter explains the situation at Keith Health Centre, how care is prioritised, how prescription ordering is changing, and where to find the right help.

Please keep this newsletter handy.

The right care

The right person, place and time

When reception or clinical staff ask about your problem, the information helps the team direct you to the most appropriate care.

Depending on your needs, the best source of help may be:

- a community pharmacist for many minor illnesses and medicines
- another member of the primary care team
- a community service, e.g. an optician or dentist
- NHS inform for trusted self-care guidance
- NHS 24 on 111 when the practice is closed

Your local pharmacies

Our local pharmacies, Clarks and Bairds, offer a minor illness service as well as Pharmacy First Plus.

Prescribing pharmacists can assess and examine you, including listening to your chest, and can prescribe treatment, including antibiotics when clinically appropriate.

You can telephone the pharmacy directly to arrange an appointment.

Using the right service can help you receive care sooner and protects GP appointments for problems that need a doctor's assessment.





Requesting a home visit

If you think you may need a home visit, please contact the practice before 10am wherever possible. Calling early helps the team assess requests, prioritise urgent needs, and plan visits safely.

A clinician will telephone you to discuss your symptoms, when they started and whether they are worsening. They may also ask about support at home and your ability to travel, to agree the safest and most appropriate care with you.

Where safe and practical, you may be invited to the surgery. Better lighting, examination equipment, tests, treatment facilities and support from colleagues can allow a more complete assessment than is possible at home.

In the time needed for one home visit, a clinician can often see at least two patients at the health centre, helping more patients receive timely care.

Home visits remain available when clinically needed for patients unable to attend because of their health or mobility. Each request is considered according to symptoms and circumstances.

Visits usually take place between morning and afternoon surgeries. Later requests may be difficult to accommodate, and an afternoon request cannot be guaranteed for a visit that day. Urgent clinical need will always be considered, but calling **before 10am** gives us the best opportunity to arrange appropriate care.

Prepare for your appointment

Before your appointment

We want you to get as much as possible from the time you have with your clinician. A little preparation beforehand can help you explain your concerns clearly, discuss what matters most to you, and understand the next steps.

The following suggestions may help you make the most of your appointment:

- Write down your main concern, when symptoms started and anything that makes it better or worse.
- **Appointments are 15 minutes long**. Mention all concerns at the start. The clinician may advise a follow-up appointment for additional issues.
- Bring a list of any medicines, vitamins or supplements that have been prescribed or purchased outwith the NHS, incl. medicines bought from a pharmacy, shop or online.

During the appointment

Explain what matters most and how the problem affects daily life. Mention worries about treatment or side-effects, and ask if anything is unclear.

Before you leave

Check that you understand the next steps, including tests, medicines, referrals, warning signs and when to seek further help. Tell us in advance if you need communication, mobility or other accessibility support.

Winter Health News



Look after yourself

✓ Keep warm, dress for the weather and take extra care in icy conditions.

✓ Keep active where you can, and eat and drink regularly.

✓ Request repeat prescriptions in good time, especially before public holidays.

✓ Take up seasonal vaccinations if eligible.

✓ Wash hands regularly and stay at home when unwell where appropriate.

✓ Use NHS inform for reliable self-care advice.

bl✓ **Check on relatives, friends and neighbours** who may be vulnerable.

✓ If you become seriously unwell or symptoms worsen, seek medical advice without delay.

Winter wellness

NHS Grampian provides winter advice on keeping well, emergency contacts and staying safe:

www.nhsgrampian.org/winter-support/





Waiting for a hospital referral?

We know that waiting to hear about a hospital appointment can be worrying, and it is not always clear who to contact. Here is a simple guide to help.

Your GP practice

We assess your health concern and, when specialist care is needed, send a referral to the appropriate hospital service with the relevant clinical information.

The hospital team

Once the referral is received, the hospital team reviews the information, decides how urgently you need to be seen, and manages the waiting list and your appointment.

While you are waiting

If you would like an update about waiting times or an appointment, the hospital team is usually best placed to help, as the practice does not normally have access to its waiting list.

Please come back to us if things change

If your symptoms become worse, your circumstances change, or you are worried about your health while waiting, please contact the practice. We can reassess you and advise on the most appropriate next step.

If you no longer need your referral or appointment, please let the hospital or the practice know so that the appointment can be offered to someone else.

Thank you

Thank you for treating our staff with kindness and for helping us make the best possible use of local healthcare services this winter.

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Prescription ordering is changing

The prescription phone line is being phased out. Written or online requests provide a clear record of medicine names, strengths and quantities, reducing the risk of details being misheard. They also help the team check your request accurately, supporting safer prescribing.

Online ordering lets you submit your repeat prescription request at any time, day or night. You can order when it suits you, but please continue to allow time for the practice and pharmacy to process your request.

Safer ways to order

- Online: sign up through www.keithhealth.centre.co.uk
- Hand your repeat prescription slip in at Keith Health Centre.
- Hand your repeat prescription slip to your pharmacy.

Please order in good time and request only the medicines you need.

Regular medication? ask about CMS

If you take regular medicines for a long-term condition, you may be eligible for the Chronic Medication Service (CMS). For suitable patients, your pharmacy supplies medicines at agreed intervals from a serial prescription, without a new reorder slip each time. Ask your community pharmacy or our reception team whether CMS could suit you.



Festive opening times

Please plan ahead for prescriptions and routine requests over the festive period.

Monday 21 December 2026: 8am–6pm

Tuesday 22 December 2026: 8am–6pm

Wednesday 23 December 2026: 8am–6pm

Thursday 24 December 2026: 8am–6pm

Friday 25 to Monday 28 December 2026: Closed

Tuesday 29 December 2026: 8am–6pm

Wednesday 30 December 2026: 8am–6pm

Thursday 31 December 2026: 8am–6pm

Friday 1 to Monday 4 January 2027: Closed

When the practice is closed

If you need urgent medical advice that cannot wait until the practice reopens, please call NHS 24 on 111. In a life- or limb-threatening emergency, call 999.

Please request repeat prescriptions in good time before the closures and allow the practice and pharmacy enough time to process them.



Wishing you all a healthy and peaceful festive season, from the team at Keith Health Centre.