

NHS Update – November 2011

On behalf of NHS Wiltshire, the Stroke Association is holding a Focus on Stroke event on **Wednesday 2nd November at the Sports Club, London Road, Devizes. Starting at 10am**, the event will include presentations from health and social care, and the voluntary sector. It is also an opportunity for those who have had a stroke and their carers to contribute to the development of stroke care in Wiltshire.

As part of the stroke awareness campaign, NHS Wiltshire's message is for people to maintain a healthy lifestyle, understand the risks, and improve awareness of what to do if a stroke is suspected. So people are encouraged to:

- Learn about the warning signs of a stroke and how to take action.
- Know their personal risk factors for blood pressure, diabetes, and cholesterol – your GP can help you understand these.
- Be physically active and exercise regularly.
- Avoid unhealthy weight gain by keeping to a healthy diet.
- Drink alcohol sensibly.
- If you smoke, seek help to stop now, and avoid breathing in other people's smoke.

As a vital way to help identify whether someone has had a stroke, NHS Wiltshire actively promotes the FAST message. FAST is the acronym to help assess three symptoms:

Facial weakness – can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye dropped?

Arm weakness – can they raise both arms?

Speech problems – can you understand what they are saying? Are they speaking clearly?

Time to call 999

A stroke is a 'brain attack'. It happens when the blood supply to a part of the brain is disturbed or cut off, damaging brain cells and affecting body functions such as the control of limb movement. Studies show that if the patient is treated immediately the risk of long-term damage is reduced, which is why FAST is so important in spotting the signs.

It's also important for people who have had a stroke to engage in exercise, because a stroke often results in reduced strength, mobility and fitness. Strokes also affect moods and can cause social isolation. NHS Wiltshire is therefore working with Wiltshire Council to introduce exercise classes for stroke survivors at leisure centres across the county.

Exercise professionals have received stroke training to run exercise after stroke classes and gym based sessions. The pilot programme is underway at Castle Place Leisure Centre, Trowbridge, and further classes will be offered in Chippenham, Salisbury, Devizes and Marlborough from January 2012.

Don't forget your flu jab

Flu is a highly infectious illness that spreads rapidly through the coughs and sneezes of people who are carrying the virus. If someone is at risk of complications from flu, it's really important they have their annual flu jab.

Anyone can get flu, but it can be more serious for certain people, such as:

- people aged 65 or over
- people who have a serious medical condition
- pregnant women

People in these groups are more vulnerable to the effects of seasonal flu (even if they are usually fit and healthy) and it's recognised that they can go on to develop a more serious illness, such as bronchitis and pneumonia, which could result in a stay in hospital. Flu can also make existing medical conditions worse, so it's important people to take up the offer of a vaccination.

The best time of the year to get a flu vaccination is now - the autumn. It's free and it's effective against the latest flu virus strains. Even if someone has already had a flu jab in previous years, they need another one this year to keep immunity up to date. The flu jab may only protect someone for a year, because the viruses that cause flu are always changing. This year's seasonal flu vaccination also includes a vaccine to protect against swine flu. See your GP about the flu jab if you're 65 or over, or if you have any of the following problems (however old you are):

- a serious heart complaint
- a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including asthma, bronchitis and emphysema
- serious kidney disease
- diabetes
- lowered immunity due to disease or treatment such as steroid medication or cancer treatment
- if you have a problem with your spleen or you have had your spleen removed
- if you have ever had a stroke

It's also important to get your flu jab if you are pregnant. Your GP may advise you to have a flu jab if you have serious liver disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or some other diseases of the nervous system. If you think you may need a flu vaccination, check with your GP, practice nurse or your local pharmacist. If a nurse visits you regularly, ask about getting your flu vaccination. Most GP surgeries arrange vaccination sessions in the autumn.

If you have any questions at all, please ask your GP.