



# Childhood winter illnesses

*Knowing what to do*



# Contents

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Winter illnesses - knowing what to do                  | 3  |
| Where to go for help                                   | 4  |
| When you can provide your child with treatment at home | 6  |
| Advice for parents about coronavirus                   | 7  |
| Conditions that are emergencies - call 999             | 8  |
| Meningitis                                             | 8  |
| Sepsis                                                 | 9  |
| Type 1 diabetes and diabetic ketoacidosis              | 10 |
| Common winter childhood illnesses                      | 11 |
| High temperature (fever)                               | 12 |
| Coughs and colds                                       | 13 |
| Sore throat                                            | 14 |
| Earache                                                | 15 |
| Diarrhoea and vomiting                                 | 16 |
| Bronchiolitis                                          | 17 |
| Prevent the spread of diseases or repeated infections  | 18 |
| Does my child need antibiotics?                        | 19 |
| Further information                                    | 20 |



# Winter illnesses - knowing what to do

Many children experience common illnesses like coughs and colds. They are all part of growing up. The information in this leaflet will help you decide when you can treat your child at home or when to seek further medical advice. Treating your child's illness yourself or with NHS online advice and medicines from your local pharmacy can often be the easiest and quickest way to help your child get better.

It can be confusing to know what to do when your child is unwell or injured - especially during the coronavirus pandemic. The information here can help you decide what to do.

It is important that you are aware of the symptoms of coronavirus so you know if you need to get your child tested and isolated. Find out more on **page 7**.

## NHS 111

111

Use **NHS 111** online or by phone for free 24-hour health support from trained advisers for things that need urgent attention. They can give you advice or arrange help from the right person.

Where needed they will arrange for you to speak to a doctor or nurse or to pick an emergency prescription. They can also book you into an appointment with a **GP**, urgent treatment centre or at **A&E** as appropriate. They can arrange an ambulance in an emergency.

Go online to [www.111.nhs.uk](https://www.111.nhs.uk) or call **111** (free from landlines and mobiles). If your child is under 5 you should use the **111** telephone service.



# Where to go for help

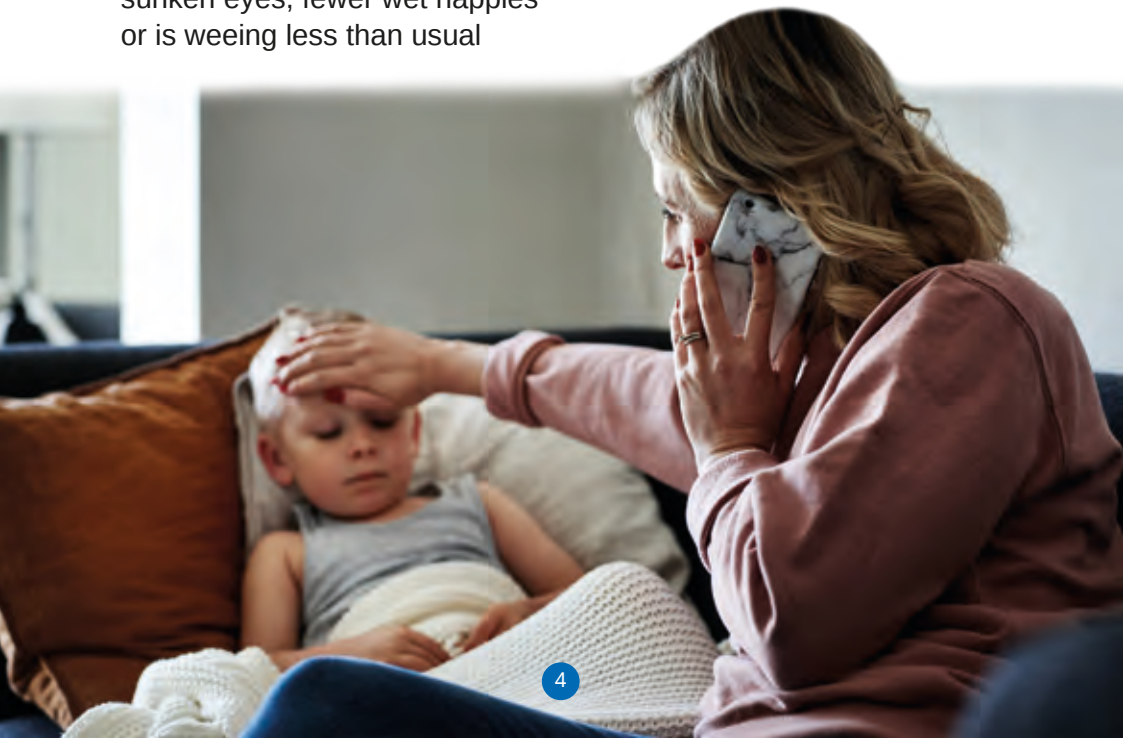
If you're concerned about your child there are various ways of seeking medical help. For non-urgent concerns you should contact your **GP** practice during opening hours. Outside of practice opening hours, or for urgent concerns, or if you're just not sure call **111**. In a real emergency call **999**. It is important that you do not wait and worry.

**GP**

**Contact your GP surgery  
(or 111 out of hours) if your child:**

**111**

- has signs of illness such as a rash as well as a high temperature
- has a high temperature that's lasted for five days (see fever and temperatures section on **page 12**)
- seems dehydrated - has sunken eyes, fewer wet nappies or is weeing less than usual
- has vomiting or abdominal pain that is not improving
- appears distressed or unwell and bothered by the light



- a stiff neck and a fever over 38°C (or over 39°C if your baby is between 3-6 months old)
- a rash that does not fade when you press a glass against it
- a seizure or fit for the first time (they cannot stop shaking)
- unusually cold hands and feet
- pale, blotchy, blue or grey skin
- a weak, high-pitched cry that's not like their usual cry
- pauses in their breathing or is grunting

or is;

- drowsy and hard to wake
- extremely agitated, and does not stop crying or is confused
- finding it hard to breathe, drawing in the muscles below their lower ribs or at their neck, or if their head is bobbing

You can find your nearest **A&E** or urgent care centre at [www.nhs.uk/service-search](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search) (tick A&E box).



# When you can provide your child with treatment at home

If your child is only mildly unwell and doesn't have any worrying symptoms consider treating them yourself. It is often the easiest and quickest way to help your child get better. You can use NHS online advice or advice and medicines from your pharmacist. But trust your instincts. If things are not improving call your **GP** (or **111** out of hours).

## Be prepared

Keep some essential medicines and first-aid supplies at home.

Some important items to have are:

- a digital thermometer (and spare batteries)
- children's liquid painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen
- decongestant or vapour-rub
- oral rehydration sachets
- antiseptic cream
- calamine lotion or cream
- teething gel
- plasters
- sterile dressings
- adhesive tape
- scissors
- hand sanitiser
- tweezers
- disposable gloves

Speak to your local pharmacist for more advice. They can advise you on supplies that will save you money but are just as effective as well known brands.

Remember to keep all medicines out of the reach of children, to check regularly that they are in date, and read the instructions.



# Advice for parents about coronavirus

## Trust your instincts and seek medical help if you need it.

GPs, hospitals and community health services are still providing the same safe care that they have always done and are still here to help. Many appointments are now taking place by phone or by video but they will see you and your child in person if they need to.

If advised to go to a **GP** surgery, clinic or hospital, it's important to go. It will be made safe for you. You should wear a face covering and use hand sanitiser provided there. Do inform the hospital or surgery if you or your child have any symptoms of coronavirus or have been in contact with someone with symptoms. Also advise them if you have returned from a country considered to be high risk in the past 14 days.

## Check if your child has coronavirus

If your child has **any** symptoms that are linked to coronavirus you should arrange for them to be tested as soon as possible (and definitely within five days of symptoms starting).

You can do this at [www.gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) or by calling **119**.

The main symptoms are:

- a high temperature
- a new continuous cough – (this means coughing a lot, for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours)
- a loss of taste or smell

If your child does have coronavirus they can pass it on which could have serious consequences for others.

Only leave your home to have a test. If the test is positive everyone must isolate for ten days from the day the first symptoms appeared. Coronavirus swab tests are not painful procedures but may cause some discomfort for a moment. Everyone your child lives with and anyone in their support bubble must stay at home until your child's test results are back.



# Conditions that are emergencies - call 999

## Meningitis

Symptoms of meningitis develop suddenly and can include:

- a high temperature
- being sick
- a headache
- a stiff neck
- a dislike of bright lights
- drowsiness
- unresponsiveness or seizures.

Your child may have a rash that does not fade when a glass is rolled over it. But a rash does not always appear, so trust your instincts and do not wait for one to develop.

Babies and toddlers may also refuse to feed or eat or not want to be held or touched. They may have a stiff body with jerky movements, or be floppy, or unable to stand up.

You should get medical advice as soon as possible if you're concerned that you or your child could have meningitis.



Call **999** for an ambulance or go to your nearest **A&E** immediately if you think you or your child might be seriously ill.



Call your **GP** (or **111** out of hours) for advice if you're not sure if it's anything serious.



**Meningitis, sepsis and type 1 diabetes are not common illnesses but you should be aware of how to spot them and what to do if your child is showing symptoms.**



## Sepsis



Sepsis is life threatening. It can be hard to spot in children. You need to act immediately if your child has any of these symptoms. Call **999** or go to **A&E**.

- blue, pale or blotchy skin, lips or tongue
- a rash that does not fade when you roll a glass over it, the same as meningitis
- difficulty breathing (you may notice grunting noises or their stomach sucking under their ribcage), breathlessness or breathing very fast
- a weak, high-pitched cry that's not like their normal cry
- not responding like they normally do, or not interested in feeding or normal activities
- being sleepier than normal or difficult to wake

Sepsis is when your body's response to an infection goes wrong and begins to injure its own tissues and organs. Without quick treatment, sepsis can lead to multiple organ failure and death.



## Type 1 diabetes and diabetic ketoacidosis

It is vital that type 1 diabetes is diagnosed as early as possible. If it is not, diabetic ketoacidosis may occur and this is life threatening.



You should call your **GP** (or **111** out of hours) immediately if your child is experiencing any of these symptoms:

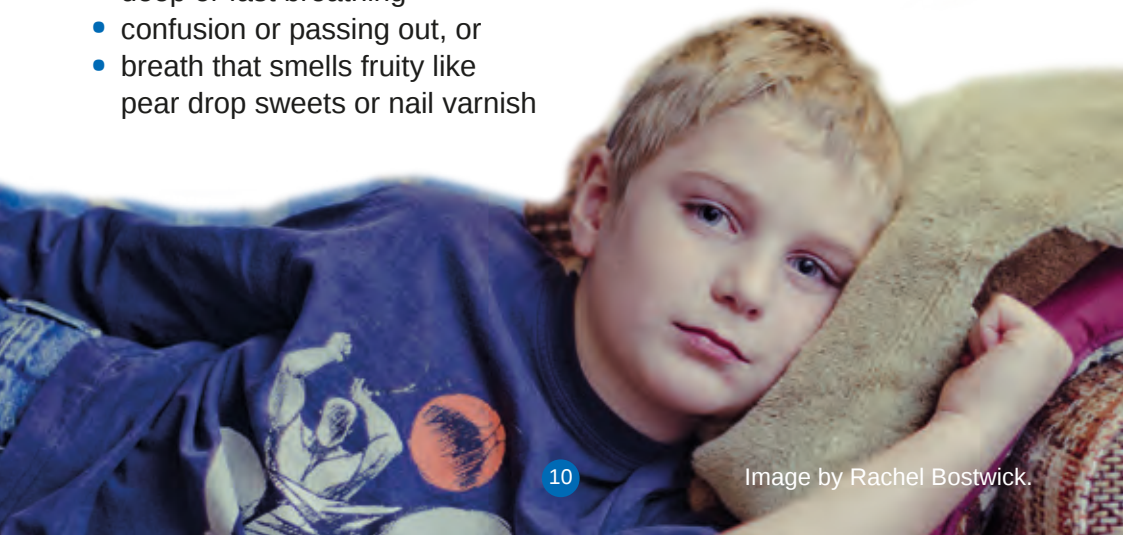
- drinking a lot and feeling excessively thirsty
- bedwetting after having previously been dry at night and for naps
- weeing more than usual
- weight loss
- feeling very tired
- cuts and grazes that are not healing, or
- thrush - a yeast infection in the mouth or genitalia that keeps coming back



Call **999** or go to **A&E** if your child is showing any of the symptoms of diabetic ketoacidosis.

**The symptoms are the same as the above for type 1 diabetes along with:**

- feeling very tired or sleepy
- being sick
- tummy pain
- deep or fast breathing
- confusion or passing out, or
- breath that smells fruity like pear drop sweets or nail varnish



# Common winter childhood illnesses

The following pages give advice on some of the common winter illnesses your child might experience. Find out how to spot the condition, how to treat your child at home, and when you might need to seek medical advice.

## Giving medicines

When giving medicines such as paracetamol or ibuprofen always check the instructions to make sure you give the right dose measurement and understand how often it can be given. There is helpful information about giving your baby or child medicines at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/health/medicines-for-babies-and-children](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/health/medicines-for-babies-and-children)

## Children's flu vaccine

The children's flu vaccine is safe and effective. It's offered every year as a nasal spray to children to help protect them against flu.

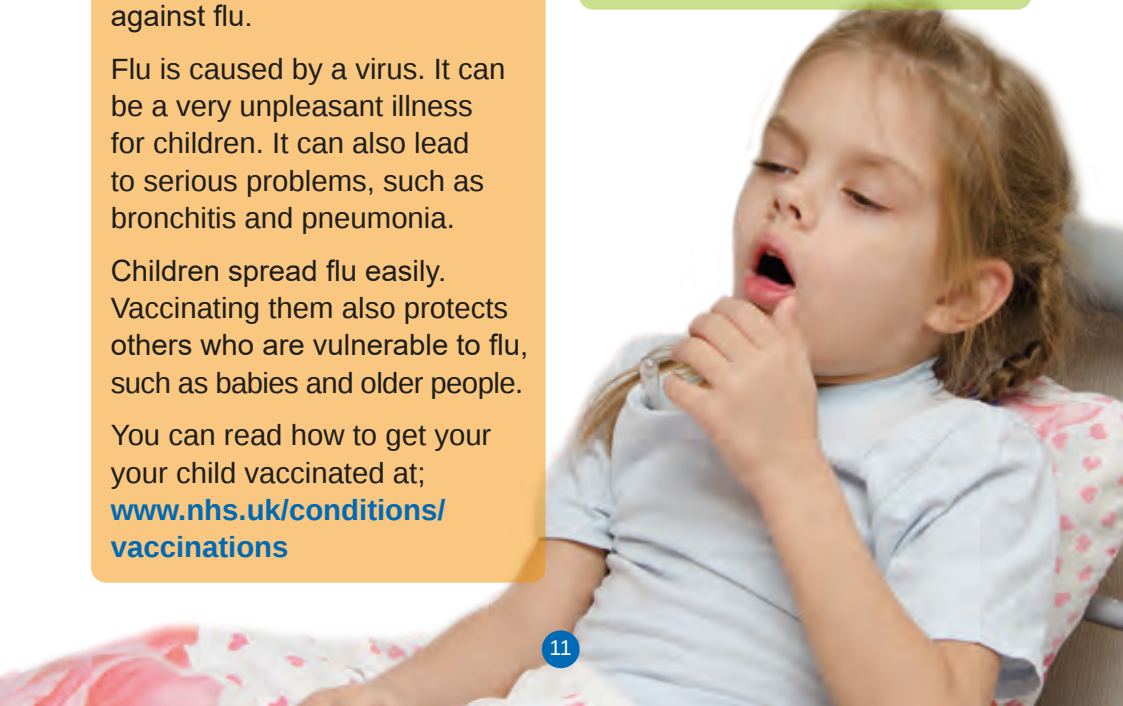
Flu is caused by a virus. It can be a very unpleasant illness for children. It can also lead to serious problems, such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

Children spread flu easily. Vaccinating them also protects others who are vulnerable to flu, such as babies and older people.

You can read how to get your child vaccinated at; [www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations)

## Other illnesses

If you would like information and advice on other childhood illnesses not included here visit [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)



## High temperature (fever)

### Symptoms

A normal temperature in babies and children is about 36.4°C, but this can vary slightly from child to child.

A high temperature is 38°C or more. However, if your baby is between 3-6 months old they have a high temperature when it is over 39°C.

It's important to measure your child's temperature accurately - you should use a digital thermometer.

Place it under the armpit for children five years and younger, and in the mouth for children over five years old. Or you can use an in-the-ear thermometer if they are more than four weeks old.

There is more information on how to take a baby's temperature at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/health](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/health) A high temperature is also a symptom of coronavirus. Follow the advice on **page 7** about getting a test.



### What you can do

- Keep your child cool by undressing them to their underwear.
- Keep their room cool (18°C or 65°F) and open a window if necessary.
- Reduce night time bedding to a light cotton sheet.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of water or their usual milk.
- Lower their temperature using either children's liquid paracetamol or ibuprofen. If your child has not improved 2-3 hours later you may want to try giving the other.
- Do remember that fever is a normal response that may help the body to fight infection and

paracetamol and ibuprofen will not get rid of it entirely.



If your child has a high temperature for five or more days, is not eating or drinking, or if you are just worried, call your **GP** (or **111** out of hours). If a rash appears, do the glass test (see **page 8**) and seek medical help quickly if it doesn't disappear.

### When to seek help



If the temperature gets worse despite attempts to bring it down or if the fever is accompanied by confusion, drowsiness, difficulty in breathing, sensitivity to light, a stiff neck call **999**.

## Coughs and Colds

### Symptoms

Coughs and colds are extremely common in young children. Your child's symptoms may be a runny or blocked nose, sneezing, sore throat, cough, headache, mild fever, tiredness, aches and pains.

A new, continuous cough might be a sign of coronavirus infection. Follow the advice on **page 7** about getting a test.

Most coughs and colds are likely to be caused by less harmful viruses. Antibiotics are of no benefit with viruses. Having green snot or a noisy chest does not mean that your child has an infection requiring antibiotics either. Noisy chests are also common in young children with viral infections.

### What you can do

- Keep your child well hydrated by offering them lots of fluids.
- You can give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen.
- Saline nose drops or spray can help ease a blocked nose.
- A spoon of honey perhaps in a warm drink half an hour before bed may help your child to wake less often in the night (only for children over one year).
- If your child is over two years you can try vapour rubs.

### When to seek help

Ask your pharmacist for advice if your child does not have coronavirus but has a cough that has not gone away after a week. Speak to your **GP** if your child also has a high temperature and is breathless as they may have a chest infection.



## Sore throat

### Symptoms

Sore throats are very common, and are often associated with a high temperature. Most sore throats are caused by viral infections.

### What you can do

To make your child more comfortable, you may want to give them paracetamol or ibuprofen. Give one of these medicines first and if your child has not improved 2-3 hours later, you may want to try giving the other. This not only helps bring down a fever but also reduces pain. You can also give throat sprays to numb the pain.

### What to look out for

Call your **GP** (or **111** out of hours) if your child has:

- a sore throat that continues for more than four days
- a high temperature for more than five days
- difficulty swallowing, eating or drinking, and opening their mouth together with neck pain
- seems dehydrated



## Earache

### Symptoms

Earache is common in children and is often accompanied by a high temperature. The earache is usually on one side and caused by a viral infection. Earache can also be caused by other things such as teething or even swimming.

Your child may also have a runny nose, cough or sore throat. They may feel unwell, be irritable, rub their ears frequently and have a poor appetite.

### What you can do

Most ear infections resolve within two or three days and don't need antibiotics. You can give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen to make them more comfortable. This not only helps with fever but also reduces pain. You can place your child in an upright position with pillows. A warm towel held against the ear may help.



### What to look out for

You should call your **GP** (or **111** out of hours) if your child:

- is having hearing problems or fluid is coming out of their ear
- doesn't seem to be getting any better after three days
- has a fever for more than five days
- has a severe headache
- has swelling or pain or redness behind the ear that is getting worse
- between 6 months and 2 years old with infection in both ears, with associated symptoms such as altered sleep, fever and being very upset
- has a serious health condition that makes them more vulnerable to serious infection



## Diarrhoea and vomiting

### Symptoms

It is common for young children to get an upset tummy from time to time. This will usually cause one or more of three symptoms: vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach pains.

Tummy bugs are almost always caused by a virus. They are easily spread. Washing your hands regularly and thoroughly can help reduce the chance of a bug spreading.

### What you can do

- It is important to give your child frequent sips of water, their usual breast or formula milk, or oral rehydration fluids from your pharmacist.
- Avoid giving fruit juice, cow's milk, fizzy drinks or squash as these drinks can worsen diarrhoea.
- If they are hungry, only offer plain food such as bread, pasta or rice.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after changing nappies, keep toilets clean and don't share towels.
- Do not let your child return to school or any other childcare facility until 48 hours after the last episode of diarrhoea or vomiting.



Babies are at more risk of becoming dehydrated when they are less than a year old and especially under six months. There are more tips on how to keep your baby hydrated at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/dehydration/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dehydration/)

### What to look out for



If your child is otherwise well it is likely the diarrhoea and vomiting will get better on its own within a few days. If the diarrhoea and vomiting persists or worsens, or your child becomes more unwell, contact your **GP**.

## Bronchiolitis

### Symptoms

The early symptoms of bronchiolitis are similar to those of a common cold, such as a runny nose and a cough.

Further symptoms then usually develop over the next few days, including:

- a slightly high temperature (fever) see **page 12**
- a dry cough
- difficulty feeding
- rapid or noisy breathing (wheezing)

### What you can do

Bronchiolitis is a common lower respiratory tract infection that affects babies and young children under two years old. Most cases are mild and clear up within two to three weeks without the need for treatment, although some children have severe symptoms and need hospital treatment.



#### What to look out for



Most cases of bronchiolitis are not serious, but call your **GP** (or call **111** out of hours) if:

- you're worried about your child
- your child has taken less than half their usual amount during the last 2 or 3 feeds, or they have had a dry nappy for 12 hours or more
- your child has a high temperature of 38°C or above that is not coming down
- your child seems very tired or irritable



# Prevent the spread of diseases or repeated infections

Many illnesses are contagious which means that they can spread through the air or through close contact. Follow these steps to reduce the risk of illness spreading.

- Make sure everyone in your household washes their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water;
  - after using the toilet, sneezing, blowing their nose or coughing
  - before preparing food, eating and drinking
  - after coming in from outdoors
- If someone in your house is unwell change towels daily and use separate ones if possible.
- Clean hard or plastic toys with water and washing up liquid and store them when dry.
- If your child is ill with diarrhoea and vomiting, keep them at home until they have had no symptoms for 48 hours.



# Does my child need antibiotics?

Children don't often need antibiotics unless they have an underlying health condition that makes them more vulnerable.

Most childhood infections including common winter illnesses such as colds, most coughs and sore throats are caused by viruses. Antibiotics only treat illnesses caused by bacteria, not viruses.

Many mild infections caused by bacteria get better on their own without using antibiotics even though this may take a little time.

Antibiotics are no longer routinely used to treat chest infections, ear infections in children or sore throats.

Take your doctor's advice on whether or not your child needs antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance is a big problem – taking antibiotics when you don't need them may mean they will not work for you in the future.

If your child is prescribed antibiotics for an infection caused by bacteria, they may seem better after two or three days. But it's important to always finish the whole course to make sure all the bacteria are killed off. If you don't finish the whole course, the infection is more likely to come back. It also increases the risk of the bacteria becoming resistant to antibiotics.



## Further information

There is advice on other childhood illnesses at

[www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Advice is available to families for coping with well babies who are crying at [www.iconcope.org](http://www.iconcope.org)

**Your local NHS has produced this leaflet for you.**

NHS Herts Valleys CCG

[www.hertsvalleysccg.nhs.uk](http://www.hertsvalleysccg.nhs.uk)

Twitter: @HVCCG

NHS East and

North Hertfordshire CCG

[www.enhertsccg.nhs.uk](http://www.enhertsccg.nhs.uk)

Twitter: @enhertsccg

