

The West of England Specialist Gender Identity Clinic  
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<https://www.dpt.nhs.uk/our-services/gender-identity>

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Dear Service User

The NHS is going through a period of unprecedented challenge because of the coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. This will temporarily effect the operation of many NHS services and we are constantly considering planning how best to provide care for our patients at a time when face-to-face out-patient contacts must be minimised, our staff may be re-deployed to provide care for people acutely ill with Covid-19, GP services are under enormous pressure, and people are advised not to leave their homes unless this is essential.

With this in mind, we want to let you know how this may affect the West of England Gender Identity Clinic (The Laurels), and make sure that you know how to access support should you require it. These are temporary changes and we hope that they will only be necessary for a few weeks. We hope that you will understand our need to balance our desire to help you achieve your identity-related goals but also to protect you and others from unnecessary risk from Covid-19.

- If you have already begun treatment with The Laurels and are due for a follow up appointment here, this will either need to be re-arranged or changed to a telephone or video consultation; we will contact you about this. **Please do not come to The Laurels unless you have been invited to attend; other visitors will not be admitted to our premises.**
- If you have not yet completed your initial diagnostic assessment and agreed a treatment plan with The Laurels, we may have to defer its completion for a few weeks, until the pressure on the NHS eases. This is because we, and all other NHS gender specialists across England and Wales, are not confident that we can adequately complete these tasks over the telephone or by videoconference. The interventions that we recommend can be life-changing and irreversible in their effects. It is important that the assessment and treatment plan we agree with you are adequate, and not compromised because we have not been able to communicate as effectively as possible with you. Everyone who has had an initial contact with us but has not yet completed assessment or treatment planning will be contacted by our psychology or Named Professional teams. If you are worried, please contact your Named Professional by email or phone for advice.
- If you have been seen at The Laurels and have received a recommendation to begin hormone treatment and monitoring provided by your GP but are having difficulty in getting this, please contact your Named Professional. GP services and hospital laboratories are under increasing pressure and may not be able to provide the blood tests that are essential for safe initiation and dose optimisation for new starters on hormone therapy. It may not be possible for you to start hormone therapy for a few weeks, until the pressure on the NHS eases.
- If you are already using hormone treatment and usually have prescriptions and monitoring provided with your GP, we hope that this will continue. However, if you are having difficulty in accessing this, please contact your Named Professional. During the current Pandemic, we will



recommend that blood tests be kept to the absolute minimum necessary to maintain your safety, in order to reduce the risk of you or GP staff acquiring Covid-19 through avoidable visits to surgeries.

- Should it temporarily become very difficult or impossible to arrange for you to receive treatments given by injections, such as testosterone (Nebido; Sustanon) or 'blockers' (Decapeptyl SR; Gonapeptyl; Prostop; Zoladex), we will suggest alternatives, which may include patches, gels or tablets.
- If you are having specific psychological treatment with The Laurels, your psychologist or psychotherapist will contact you about this. If you are worried, please contact your Named Professional by email or phone for advice.
- It is very unlikely that Speech and Language Therapy and Epilation (hair reduction) services will be available until the epidemic subsides and social distancing measures are no longer necessary.
- Chest and Genital Reconstructive Surgery will be unavailable for several months because these hospital services are being reallocated for the care of people with life-threatening conditions, including those related to Covid-19.
- **If you become unwell and have symptoms suggestive of Covid-19 infection, or if you are self-isolating, and are due to receive a treatment by injection (see list below), you should NOT go to your surgery for your injection but, instead, let your GP know as soon as possible, cancel the scheduled appointment, remain in self-isolation for the period currently recommended by government and the NHS, and reschedule your injection for a time after the period of self-isolation is completed.** Your injection should be given as soon as possible after you complete the recommended period of self-isolation.
  - Testosterone injections: Nebido® and Sustanon®. These injections may be safely delayed, although you may experience a temporary resumption of vaginal bleeding, particularly with Sustanon. It is possible to switch to a transdermal gel preparation but this too may result in a temporary resumption of vaginal bleeding.
  - Gonadotropin Releasing Hormone Analogue or 'blocker' injections: Decapeptyl SR®, triptorelin; Prostop®, leuprorelin; Zoladex®, goserelin. These injections may be safely delayed for several weeks, with a very low risk of a resumption of testosterone or estradiol release. They usually continue to suppress hormone release for many weeks after the next injection is due. This continuance of effect is longer in people who have received a GnRHa for a long time; for someone who has received it for a year or more, it might take up to two years for its effects to cease.

The Laurels team will continue working to provide you with access to essential medical and psychological interventions during this difficult time. If you are worried, please contact your Named Professional by email to arrange a consultation with them. If you do not receive a response from your Named Professional within two weeks, please contact The Laurels admin team on [dpn-tr.TheLaurels@nhs.net](mailto:dpn-tr.TheLaurels@nhs.net).

Yours sincerely



Maria Morris  
Clinical Team Leader