

Patient information factsheet

Virtual acute care (VAC)

We have given you this factsheet because your doctor has referred you to the virtual acute care (VAC) service. It explains what the VAC service is, how it can support you and who to contact if your symptoms worsen or you have concerns. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of the factsheet.

What is virtual acute care (VAC)?

VAC is a new service that is being run by the acute medicine unit (AMU) team here at University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust (UHS). The aim of the VAC service is to treat and care for people in the comfort and safety of their own home while they recover from a range of conditions.

The VAC service is run by a team of trained healthcare professionals, including:

- consultants
- specialist nurses
- an advanced clinical practitioner

Who is this service suitable for?

After a brief assessment in the hospital, an AMU consultant will decide whether treatment through the VAC service is suitable for you.

The VAC service can care for people who:

- are well enough to look after themselves at home
- are able to swallow and keep down tablet antibiotics
- do not have sepsis (a life-threatening reaction to an infection)
- are between the ages of 18 to 79
- live within the catchment area of UHS

What are the benefits of VAC?

The VAC service enables people who would otherwise be in hospital to receive the acute care, monitoring and treatment they need in their own home or usual place of residence.

There are many benefits to VAC, including:

- recovering in the comfort of your own home
- reducing the risk of hospital-transmitted infections
- avoiding long waits to see a healthcare professional in the emergency department (ED) or same day emergency care (SDEC) unit
- guaranteed access to a health care professional during the course of your treatment
- less trips to and from the hospital for treatment(s)
- working together with your clinical team to help speed up your recovery

What happens next?

If the doctor has decided that VAC is suitable for you, we will visit you on the ward before you leave hospital (also known as being 'discharged') and will provide you with any medication(s) and equipment (along with instructions on how to use it) that you will need to continue recovering safely at home.

A member of the VAC team will call you each day to check on your progress. They will ask you questions about your symptoms and ask you to tell them the readings on any equipment they have given you (known as your 'observations'). These daily calls are a good opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have.

The time it takes to fully recover is different for everyone. However, most people will usually only need to be under the care of the VAC service for five days.

Will I have home visits from a nurse or doctor?

The VAC service does not include home visits. The aim of the service is to give you advice and treatment virtually without the need for a face-to-face appointment. This includes any changes you may need to your medication(s).

If during your treatment we feel that you need a face-to-face assessment, we will arrange this for you in the same day emergency care (SDEC) unit. This means that you will not have to wait for a long time to be seen in ED.

What equipment will I need and how do I use it?

Before you leave hospital, we will train you to use the relevant equipment and record your observations. The equipment will usually include a:

- blood pressure monitor (device to measure your blood pressure)
- thermometer (device to measure your temperature)
- pulse oximeter (device to measure your heart rate and oxygen levels)

Please remember that the equipment is hospital property and looking after it is your responsibility.

If you are unsure how to use the equipment or the equipment isn't working properly, please call us for advice using the telephone number at the end of the factsheet.

How do I return the equipment?

When you have fully recovered, we will discharge you from the VAC service. You will then need to return the borrowed equipment back to the hospital.

To return the equipment, please go to the **same day emergency care (SDEC) unit** which is on C level, North Wing at Southampton General Hospital (opposite AMU).

What if I feel unwell while recovering at home?

You should tell us during your daily phone call with us if:

- you experience any new symptoms, or
- your observations are showing any worrying changes.

For more information about what symptoms to look out for and what actions to take if you are feeling unwell, please see the table on the next page.

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Symptoms to watch out for and actions to take

Continue with your current treatment plan

If the points outlined below apply to you, this is a good sign and shows you may be improving:

- gradual improvement in your symptoms
- eating and drinking normally
- pulse range between 50 to 90 beats per minute most of the day
- oxygen levels (measured through pulse oximeter) consistently above 94%

Seek medical attention

If you experience any of the following symptoms, call the **VAC helpline, GP or 111** for advice:

- not eating and drinking due to a lack of appetite
- a fever (a temperature of 38C or above) that is not responding to cooling techniques and paracetamol
- redness spreading (cellulitis) outside of the demarcated area (border around the area of cellulitis)
- feeling too weak to get out of bed (if you are usually able to get out of bed)
- vomiting (being sick) and not able to keep medications down

Seek urgent medical attention

Call **999** immediately if you experience any of the following signs or symptoms:

- rapid spread of the infection rash (within hours)
- blue lips or face
- pulse consistently over 100 at rest
- cold, clammy or mottled skin
- severe vomiting and unable to swallow fluids or tablets
- collapse

Your data and privacy

For details of how your data is collected and used while you are using our services, including VAC, please visit our website: www.uhs.nhs.uk/about-the-trust/privacy/privacy-notice

Contact us

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us.

In working hours

VAC helpline

Telephone: **023 8120 4716** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

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Outside working hours

Same day emergency care (SDEC) unit

Telephone: **023 8120 6284** (Monday to Friday, 5pm to 9pm, weekends and bank holidays, 9am to 9pm)

Outside of these hours, call NHS **111** or **999** as appropriate based on the information in the table on page 3.

Useful links

www.england.nhs.uk/virtual-wards

www.england.nhs.uk/virtual-wards/what-is-a-virtual-ward

www.nhsconfed.org/publications/realising-potential-virtual-wards

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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