

Thursday 11 March

Full steam ahead for the local COVID-19 programme as another three centres open in Essex and Suffolk

Three new large vaccination centres will open their doors across Essex and Suffolk this week as the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme continues to gather momentum.

The centres will offer the life-saving vaccine initially to people aged 55 and over as part of the biggest programme in NHS history which has already seen more than 18 million people vaccinated in England.

The opening of the centres comes as the NHS launches text message alerts for the over 55s and 40,000 unpaid carers to make it quicker and easier for those eligible to book an appointment for their jab.

The new centres opening across Essex and Suffolk this week are:

- The Practice, Tylers Ride, South Woodham Ferrers, Essex (former GP surgery) opening Thursday, 11 March
- College Heath Road, Mildenhall, Suffolk (current West Suffolk Council offices) opening Friday, 12 March
- Unity Trust Offices, Park Road, Haverhill, Suffolk opening Saturday, 13 March

The new centres bring the total number of vaccination centres opened by Essex University NHS Foundation Trust to 13. The centres across mid, south and north Essex and Suffolk are among more than 1,600 sites offering the vaccine nationally

Anthony McKeever, Executive Lead Mid and South Essex Health and Care Partnership and Joint Accountable Officer for Mid and South Essex CCGs, said: "I am delighted that another vaccination centre is opening in Essex, as we build upon the momentum of the vaccination programme across the county. Mobilising a vaccination centre is a complicated process, drawing upon teams and resources from across the NHS as well as our brilliant teams of volunteers.

"My thanks go out to the continued efforts and commitment of everyone supporting this programme."

Dr Ed Garratt, Chief Executive, Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System, said: "The opening of these new centres will undoubtedly strengthen the vaccination drive, which is already going incredibly well and will enable everyone in phase one priority groups to be offered a vaccination by the mid-April.

“I’m incredibly proud of what the staff and volunteers have achieved so far and know their continued hard work will help us in our fight against Covid-19.”

Cllr John Griffiths, Leader of West Suffolk Council, said: “West Suffolk has, with partners, been at the forefront of the response to COVID-19 helping the NHS where we can and delivering key services. We are really pleased to be able to play our part in the vaccination programme by providing facilities in our Mildenhall offices.

"We urge anyone who is eligible to have their vaccine and to continue following the hands, face, space guidance to help protect the NHS and save lives."

Tim Coulson, Chief Executive of Unity Schools Partnership, said: “We are delighted that some of our office space in Haverhill has been taken over as a vaccination centre and are excited to see local people given protection from coronavirus.

“We pay tribute to the great work of NHS colleagues, volunteers and everyone involved in managing such an amazing job of rapid vaccination right across the country.”

People aged 55 and over and unpaid carers are receiving text messages from the NHS this week inviting them to book an appointment via the national booking service nhs.uk/covidvaccination.

In some cases text messages have been used by scammers to try to collect personal details from people, get them to ring premium rate numbers or enter their banking details. The text message will be sent using the Government’s secure Notify service and will show as being sent from ‘NHSvaccine’. The NHS will never ask for payment or banking details.

The NHS is urging people only to come to the vaccination centre if they have a booked appointment and to arrive no more than five minutes before their booking.

NHS staff are also visiting those who are housebound and unable to travel to their local service or vaccination centre.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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More Information about EPUT

Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (EPUT) provides community health, mental health and learning disability services across Essex, Suffolk and Bedfordshire.

EPUT employs more than 6,000 staff across more than 200 sites

EPUT was formed on 1 April 2017 following the merger of North Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (NEP) and South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT).