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Neonatal unit honoured with prestigious recognition

A HOSPITAL team has been honoured with prestigious recognition for improving patient care.

The neonatal unit at The James Cook University Hospital has been awarded the UNICEF Baby Friendly Award for its work in the ongoing commitment to increase breastfeeding rates and improve care for all mothers on the unit.

The milestone achievement sees the unit join a select few institutions to have gained recognition from the UK Committee for UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) in the country.

Neonatal unit ward manager Vicky Ford said: “This award from the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative reflects our ongoing commitment to increase breastfeeding rates and improve care for all mothers on our neonatal unit. I am immensely proud of the whole team.”

Part of a global programme, The Baby Friendly Initiative aims to transform healthcare for babies, their mothers and families as part of a wider global partnership between UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO).

In the UK, the BFI works with public services to better support families with feeding and developing close, loving relationships to ensure that all babies get the best possible start in life.

The distinguished award is given to health facilities/hospitals/universities after an extensive assessment by a UNICEF UK team has shown that recognised best practice standards are in place.

Project lead Jenna Lawler said: “Breastfeeding protects babies against a wide range of serious illnesses, including gastroenteritis and respiratory infections in infancy, as well as cardiovascular disease, asthma, diabetes and obesity later in life. “We also know that breastfeeding reduces the mother’s risk of some cancers and that it supports the mental health of both mother and baby.”

UNICEF UK BFI deputy programme director Anne Woods added: “We are delighted that the neonatal unit has achieved full Baby Friendly status. Our work to support breastfeeding is based on extensive and resounding evidence that breastfeeding saves lives, improves health and cuts costs in every country worldwide, rich and poor alike. Mothers in James Cook’s neonatal unit can be confident that the whole team will provide high standards of care.”

Flu hit hospitals in England even harder last week, as a ‘tidal wave’ of infections led to a 70% increase in hospital cases across just 7 days.

The NHS is encouraging eligible people to get vaccinated without delay if they haven't done so already to avoid “festive flu” with an average of 1,861 patients with flu in hospital every day last week – up from 1,099 in the previous week and a staggering 3.5 times higher compared to the same time last year. Norovirus and RSV are also on the rise – norovirus cases are up by 10% from last week and almost two thirds since (64%) last year and 152 children were in hospital with RSV each day, up by over two fifths on the same period last year (107 week ending 10 December 2023). The “tidal wave” of seasonal illnesses is prompting further “quad-demic” concerns across the NHS with staff pulling out the stops to deliver almost 28 million vaccines so far in convenient places like Christmas markets, football clubs, and supermarkets. Despite busier urgent care services going into winter, the waiting list fell from 7.57 million to 7.54 million with staff delivering a record 1.67 million treatments in a month, up 6% on the same month before the pandemic (1.57 million in October 2019). The estimated number of patients waiting in October was 6.34 million. The number of patients waiting longer than 18 weeks (3.1 million) is the lowest since June 2023, while the number of waits longer than a year (234,885) is now the lowest since December 2020 and down 46% on the peak of 436,127 in March 2021. Pressure on urgent and emergency services did not let up last month, with more ambulance contacts than any other November (1.18 million), up 6% on last year (1.1 million in Nov 2023). There was also a significant increase in the most serious category 1 incidents, up almost a third last month on the same period pre-pandemic (84,266 vs 63,227). It was the busiest November on record for A&E staff with a total of 2.31 million attendances, 7% higher than last year (2.17 million in Nov 2023).

Professor Sir Stephen Powis, NHS National Medical Director, said: “The tidal wave of flu cases and other seasonal viruses hitting hospitals is really concerning for patients and for the NHS – the figures are adding to our ‘quad-demic’ worries. While the NHS has plans in place to manage additional demand over the busy winter period, with 1 week left to book your vaccine, I cannot stress enough the importance of getting booked in to protect yourself against serious illness and to avoid ‘festive flu. Despite the extreme winter pressures early in the year, the figures out today show further improvements towards boosting NHS productivity – not only is the covid backlog reducing but more people than ever before received treatment, a faster cancer diagnosis or a diagnostic check – which shows the truly remarkable efforts from staff. We will work with government to bring the waits for care even further with the 10-year health plan next year helping us to transform services for the future, but as the incredibly busy winter continues, I would encourage everyone to remember to use NHS 111 in the first instance and only use A&E and 999 in life-threatening emergencies”.

Healthwatch Hartlepool

Greenbank, Waldon Street, Hartlepool, TS24 7QS

Tel 0800 2545552

Text; 07749 688795

yoursay@healthwatchhartlepool.co.uk www.healthwatchhartlepool.co.uk