healthwatch Cheshire West

healthwatch Cheshire East

Supporting Boaters to Access Primary Care and COVID-19 Vaccinations

March - May 2021

Introduction

Building on three years' experience of working with partners, during March to May 2021 Healthwatch Cheshire worked in partnership with the Waterways Chaplaincy to raise awareness of a new GP Access Card and arrange for Boaters to receive them, as well as discuss the COVID-19 vaccine with the Boating Community.

Often a group of people overlooked, we were aware of issues particularly around some Boaters receiving good support from GPs with no issues registering at Practices, whilst others experienced difficulties in registering at certain GP Practices due to postcode issues. The Boaters we spoke to recommended that signage at key points along the canals indicating local services and how to access them, leaflets and online information regarding emergency numbers, local GP Practices that will accept boaters as patients, and other support information, would be useful to them.

Healthwatch Cheshire has previously worked with the Boating Community to produce reports on these issues outlined above affecting Boaters when accessing health and care.

These two reports were published in March 2018 and March 2019 and can be found on their websites:

https://healthwatchcwac.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports/

https://healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports/

Our work with the Boating Community between March and May 2021 represents Healthwatch Cheshire acting upon these issues by helping Boaters to access primary care and signposting information.

This engagement took place as part of work with NHS Cheshire CCG, Cheshire East Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council, Healthwatch Halton, Healthwatch Warrington, and voluntary and community organisations to ensure that people know how they can access their vaccine. Many members of the Boating Community prefer the independence of separate moorings away from main centres, and so it can be more difficult to locate them. Healthwatch Cheshire would particularly like to thank the Waterways Chaplaincy, who provide pastoral support to the boating community, for their excellent support, enthusiasm, and knowledge that has enabled Healthwatch to reach so many members of this community.

Martin Buck, of the Waterways Chaplaincy, said: "*This work enables comprehensive coverage of the network that will give boaters the confidence to register at any surgery, despite being miles from home or without the luxury of having a home surgery.*"

Tracey Cole, Executive Director Strategy & Partnerships at NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group, said: "*By using their existing links with the residents of Cheshire's waterways, who may often be overlooked as a hidden community with unique social, health and wellbeing needs, Healthwatch and the River Chaplaincy were intrinsic in helping us to ensure that this community were able to access both GP services and the Covid-19 vaccine. I have no doubt that better relationships were built and lives were saved. Thank you Healthwatch for continued meaningful collaboration which makes a difference.*"

What we did

The Cheshire ring of canals consists of 97 miles of canals with over 35 marinas and many private moorings, with an extra 30 miles of canals and 8 marinas in Warrington and Halton. Figures provided by the Canal and River Trust estimate that there are approximately 700 people living permanently aboard boats for 12 months of the year in Cheshire, Warrington and Halton. Many members of the Boating Community gravitated to the marinas during the COVID-19 pandemic as they provide supplies, fresh water, Calor gas and toilet emptying facilities. Unfortunately, there were some marinas that we were unable to access due to guidelines around the COVID-19 pandemic, and some marinas not feeling comfortable with us attending in the context of this. Visiting 45 marinas, designated moorings, canals, towns and villages on foot across Cheshire and Warrington and Halton over the month, Healthwatch Cheshire have been able to talk to 89 members of the boating community and marina staff who have offered support, advice and guidance on a variety of subjects. These have included queries about the COVID-19 vaccination process such as the practicalities of obtaining a vaccine if people are either a long way from their own GP or have moved areas, as well as feedback on subjects from GP access to mental health support.

Healthwatch Cheshire staff were able to provide information about the GP Access Cards, which allow people to register with a GP Practice without having to provide proof of address, something that can be an issue for Boaters who often travel from place to place on the canals. Information was also given about how these cards can help with being able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, and the vaccination programme taking place throughout Cheshire. Posters explaining the GP Access Cards and Boaters' rights to GP access were displayed on Canal and River Trust noticeboards along the canal system and in marinas and canal-side shops. Healthwatch Cheshire would like to thank managers of marinas and the Canal and River Trust for allowing us to display information on their noticeboards. With permission from the group admin, Healthwatch Cheshire also posted information about the GP Access Cards in the Cheshire Boaters' Facebook Group, reaching 662 members. An article on our engagement with the Boating Community was also published in the news publication 'Towpath Talk', and can be read here:

www.towpathtalk.co.uk/raising-awareness-of-boaters-rights-to-doctors-surgeries-and-covid-jabs

The engagement with the Boating Community was carried out throughout March 2021. Healthwatch Cheshire utilised four members of our team to carry out this engagement over eight full days. The Waterways Chaplaincy supported this work with two members of their team. A schedule was compiled using teams of two people, where possible consisting of one member of Healthwatch Cheshire and one member of the Waterways Chaplaincy.

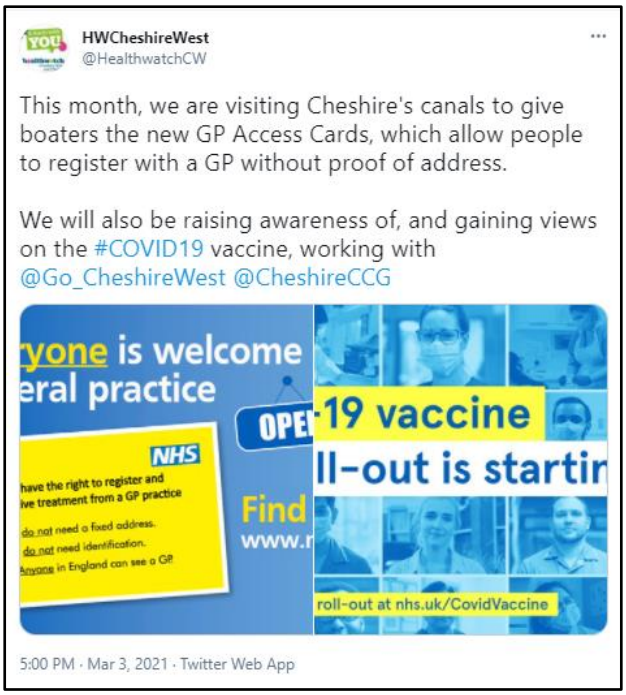
Engaging with the Boating Community

The below uses tweets to document our engagement activity with the Boating Community across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington during March 2021.

You can view our Twitter threads here:

https://twitter.com/HealthwatchCE/status/1367159764996788226

https://twitter.com/HealthwatchCW/status/1367157822857900033



HWCheshireEast
@HealthwatchCE

Replying to @HealthwatchCE

Friday then saw us head on to Bollington Wharf, where we delivered posters and spoke to boaters about their views on the COVID19 vaccine, and GP Access Cards.

Great to work in partnership with other voluntary and community organisations, to reach people all across Cheshire.

8:38 AM · Mar 8, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireEast
@HealthwatchCE

Replying to @HealthwatchCE

Good to hear from boaters in Audlem today that many have already had the first of their #COVID19 vaccines.

We met up with Waterways Chaplain, Martin Buck, to chat to boaters and put up posters with information on GP Access Cards.

@CheshireEast @CheshireCCG @CRTNorthWest

5:01 PM · Mar 8, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireWest
@HealthwatchCW

Replying to @HealthwatchCW @CheshireCCG and @CRTNorthWest

Yesterday we visited canals around Northwich and Winsford.

Boaters told us about the great service they had at Watling Street and Danebridge Medical Centre.

Also a great comment about the life-saving cancer treatment received at @MidCheshireNHS.
@Go_CheshireWest
@CheshireCCG

2:16 PM · Mar 17, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireWest
@HealthwatchCW

Replying to @HealthwatchCW @CheshireCCG and 3 others

Some boaters have already had their #COVID19 vaccine, with people telling us about the helpful and efficient service they had experienced at the vaccination centres, including at Morrisons in #Winsford.

@Go_CheshireWest
@CheshireCCG

2:17 PM · Mar 17, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireWest
@HealthwatchCW

Replying to @HealthwatchCW @CheshireCCG and 3 others

People have been mentioning the helpfulness of marina staff and managers signposting to local services such as GPs.

A big thank you to the @CRTNorthWest staff at @AndertonLift for the useful info we're passing to them.

People are looking forward to using GP Access Cards.

2:18 PM · Mar 17, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireWest
@HealthwatchCW

Replying to @HealthwatchCW @CheshireCCG and 4 others

Yesterday we were at #Tattenhall and Golden Nook Moorings near #Waverton.

Great to hear about the fantastic mental health support a boater received from their GP.

On Monday we will be visiting the canals around #Warrington to speak to boaters there.

@CheshireCCG
@CRTNorthWest

2:56 PM · Mar 18, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireWest
@HealthwatchCW

Replying to @HealthwatchCW @CheshireCCG and 3 others

Great for our work with the Waterways Chaplaincy to be featured in @towpathtalk, raising awareness among boaters of GP Access Cards and also how to access their #COVID19 vaccinations.

Read the article here:

towpathtalk.co.uk/raising-awaren...

@Go_CheshireWest
@CheshireCCG
@CRTNorthWest

11:37 AM · Mar 19, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireWest
@HealthwatchCW

Replying to @HealthwatchCW @CheshireCCG and 2 others

Today we have visited boaters at Fiddlers Ferry, Stockton Heath, and Preston Brook in partnership with @HWWarrington and @hwhalton, to spread the word about GP Access Cards and ask about views on the #COVID19 vaccine.

@CRTNorthWest
@CheshireCCG
@WarringtonCCG
@HaltonCCG

4:14 PM · Mar 22, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireWest
@HealthwatchCW

Replying to @HealthwatchCW @CheshireCCG and 6 others

Tuesday saw us take to the towpaths, locks and marinas around #Chester and #EllesmerePort.

"This will give boaters the confidence to register at any surgery, despite being miles from home or having a home surgery." – Martin Buck, Waterways Chaplaincy

@CRTNorthWest

3:54 PM · Mar 24, 2021 · Twitter Web App

HWCheshireEast
@HealthwatchCE

Replying to @HealthwatchCE

It is the perfect day to be walking along Cheshire's canals.

Today we've been to @heritageNboats Heritage Marina Scholar Green, Rode Heath Rise, and Congleton Wharf, talking to boaters about the #COVID19 vaccine and GP Access Cards.

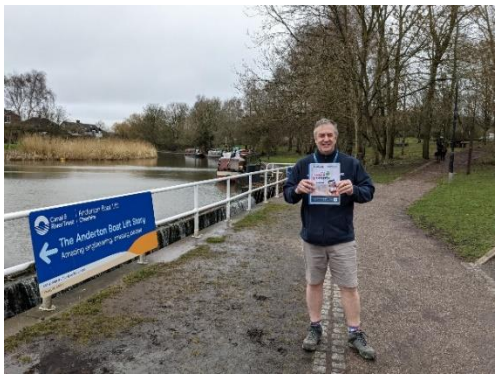
@CRTNorthWest
@CheshireCCG
@CheshireEast

1:42 PM · Mar 31, 2021 · Twitter Web App

What people told us

A sample of some of the questions, concerns and responses we heard from members of the Boating Community are included below:

Feedback on GP Access Cards:



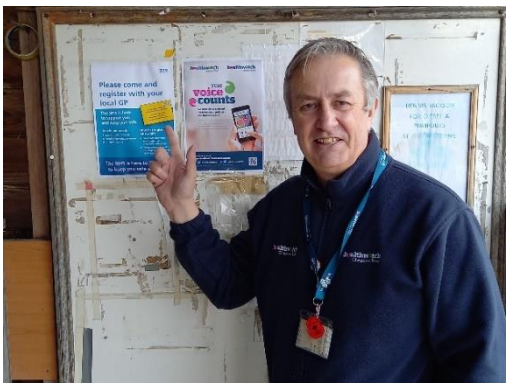
- *"We are a bit stuck at the moment due to a bank burst but once we are able to get out, should I ever have an issue at a GP Practice, knowing that I am entitled to register is great news thank you, it's so good that you are out and about."* (Tattenhall Marina)
- *"I have had mental health issues and the GP surgery at Boughton Heath was fantastic in providing support. The GP Practice has assisted with support for my daughter also and again was first class."* (Tattenhall Marina)
- *"Yes, very happy to display this information, I've heard of people having issues at GP Practices, but knowing this will really help."* (Bunbury Marina)
- *"Yes, I'll display your posters as the information is so important and having this information will make a great difference."* (Wrenbury)
- *"It's difficult to register if I'm on my travels and I'm not sure that reception staff know the rules."* (Fiddlers Ferry, Halton)
- *"I will ensure that those living on know about this and that they can register anywhere when they are away from here."* (Fiddlers Ferry, Halton)
- *"Thank you for this information it's a great help and will be great to know when I'm travelling."* (Preston Brook Wharf)
- *"Does this apply to just boaters or to everyone as I'm hoping to spend time with my family down south when this (Covid) is over?"* (Fiddlers Ferry, Halton)
- *"Not experienced any issues on attending doctors when I'm travelling."* (Ellesmere Port Boat Museum)
- *"Not had any problems, but my friend did a year or so ago. I will let them know. Will you get the cards out to people?"* (Ellesmere Port Boat Museum)
- *"I don't travel too far so I maintain the same doctor locally. It works well. The scheme is a good idea however as I'm sure people do face issues."* (Chester Zoo)
- *"Not had any issues when travelling if I need to see a doctor. The card scheme is a good idea as it can clear any confusion."* (Congleton Wharf)
- *"I've not had any concerns with the doctors, I'm often asked for a care of address but I've also had a prescription given to me with the address as "The Boat"."* (Congleton Wharf)
- *"Not had any problems. I've been up here looking after my mother in Congleton. When I'm travelling the doctors are great, I didn't know about people having issues with some. The card you mentioned will be handy to have, when and where will I get one?"* (Congleton Wharf)
- *"We are often able to gain access to all GP services regardless of where we are, I've not been met with any barriers. Appreciate people like you being out on the canal though. I'll be having my second jab soon and I will feel relieved as it's been a difficult period for many."* (Rode Heath)

- *"It's a great idea having these types of cards and will really help people if in difficulty. I've experienced a few reception staff who query my address especially when I say my boat but always able to resolve. Maybe better training of staff would help but so will these cards."* (Scholar Green Marina).

Anyone requiring a GP Access Card should contact Healthwatch Cheshire by telephoning 0300 323 0006 or emailing info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk.

Feedback on the COVID-19 vaccination process:

- *"Nothing but praise for the system; went to local vaccine centre at Middlewich and they helped me."* (Middlewich)
- *"I've had my jab, it was brilliantly done."* (Golden Nook Moorings)
- *"I had mine in Birmingham a few weeks ago, I will be back down there to get my other one, great and easy I've had no side effects."* (Nantwich) - Healthwatch Cheshire did assure the gentleman that he did not need to return to Birmingham and explained how he could obtain his second vaccine locally.
- *"I had gone to Morrisons in Winsford for mine and wife's vaccination. Couldn't beat the organisation - just brilliant. We will be back in a few weeks."* (Anderton)
- *"Yes, I've had my jab thank you. It's great to see you out and about doing stuff like this and it's nice to chat as I haven't seen that many people."*
- *"Can't thank them enough, so helpful and assisted me so much. Thank you."* (Uplands Marina)
- *"I've had my jabs. I got a text to my phone and an appointment was made. I went to the Civic Hall in Nantwich. What a service, everything was and is so professional, thank you."* (Wrenbury)
- *"The jab is fantastic; people should take it if offered. It's saving people and we will be able to start moving on again."* (Salt Museum Moorings)
- *"I've had my jab and the staff at Watling Street are brilliant."* (Northwich Marina)
- *"The process of getting a vaccine is confusing to me but the staff at Watling Street are brilliant and explained everything for me so I felt aware."* (Northwich Marina)
- *"I'm not sure about the jab especially as some countries won't use it (AstraZeneca) but if everyone is having it, I'll have mine."* - Healthwatch Cheshire reassured the gentleman that the risks were negligible.
- *"Can I choose which one I get*?" (Northwich Marina) - Healthwatch Cheshire advised that he would need to speak to his GP and find out what is available.
- *"I've had my jab locally but I'm worried about my second as the news says there may be a shortage."* (Preston Brook Wharf) - Healthwatch Cheshire were able to reassure him that there would be no shortage and that those people who had received an initial dose would receive the same vaccine.
- *"I've had my jab and felt great no side effects, I had mine at Warrington."* (Preston Brook Wharf)
- *"I have had my jab and although my arm was sore for a few days I had no real issues. I had the AstraZeneca jab just a brilliant service, thank you."*
(Preston Brook Wharf)



Case Study: Supporting a Boater to access a COVID-19 vaccination

Our work with the Boating Community in Cheshire led Healthwatch Cheshire to be approached by NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to assist a Boater based in Cheshire with no permanent address to access a COVID-19 vaccination.

The CCG had originally been approached by a relative of the Boater. The Boater, who has mental health issues, had received a text message from his GP Practice 100 miles away to say that he was eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine due to his medical issues. Healthwatch Cheshire telephoned the relative, who was really grateful to finally hear from someone. The relative told us that he had spoken to the receptionist at a local GP Practice who said they would call him back. As it had initially appeared that the issue had been resolved, Healthwatch Cheshire asked him to call us back if the GP Practice didn't get in touch.

The following day he called us back to say his call had yet to be returned. Healthwatch Cheshire called the GP Practice and asked to speak to the Practice Manager, and were told by the receptionist that she would call us back. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Healthwatch Cheshire therefore contacted another GP Practice in the area, where a receptionist arranged a date and a time for the Boater to receive his vaccination.

Healthwatch Cheshire informed the individual's relative and they were very happy and grateful. A few days later he called us again to let us know that the Boater had been given his vaccine.

- *"I have had my first jab. Must admit I felt really rough for a few days, but great now. Everyone should have it, especially if we are going to come out of lockdown. Plus, if people are going to keep using the towpath as a walking route it will ensure the Boaters living on will be ok."* (Preston Brook Wharf)
- *"I went to the Brindley, it was so easy."* (Preston Brook Marina)
- *"I had my jab in Warrington. just so well organised thank you."* (Lyme Marina)
- *"My dad got a letter saying he could go to the Etihad [Stadium, Manchester] so I took him up there. It was fantastically organised, but as soon as we were back, he had a message saying he could get a jab at his doctors. I'm not moaning because he has had it but is there not a better system of making sure people are contacted?"* (Lyme Marina)
- *"Worked well for me thank you. Really well organised. I got a text and went to the Hospital."* (Congleton Wharf)
- *"I'm just getting everything ready for when I can travel. I've had one jab at the Hospital (Warrington). I'm due the other in a few weeks."* (Pickering's Bridge)
- *"We have had no issues, got jabbed locally and always able to see doctor wherever we go. How come you found this place, very few know where it is?"* (Park Farm)
- *"I had my jab at the Civic Centre Ellesmere Port. Plenty of staff on hand to support."* (Ellesmere Port Boat Museum)

- *"It's very quiet I've not seen anyone for a week. I had my jab at Chester Racecourse, all very simple really. I've had no issues anywhere with doctors although I tend to stay local and go to the Fountains if I'm ill."* (Craughton Top Farm Moorings)
- *"I had my jab only 2 weeks ago and it was a great process organised by my doctor at the Fountains. I felt like I had a cold for a day or two but it's fine."* (Telford Warehouse, Chester)
- *"I've had my jab, thank you. Easy process to get my second, all being well at the end of April. Great to see people considering Boaters thank you. I've had no issues when travelling the system."* (Telford Warehouse, Chester)
- *"I'm getting my boat ready for the off. I've had my jab locally in Congleton, all went well. I will get my second soon. Never had a problem with the doctors."* (Congleton Wharf)
- *"I've lived on board for a long time. I'm not having the vaccination as I don't mix with people, I keep myself to myself."* (Congleton Wharf) - Healthwatch Cheshire discussed the benefits of the vaccination programme but the gentleman said that he did not want to receive the vaccination.
- *"I had my jab in Sandbach, very well organised though it was cold waiting outside. Once I have my second vaccination I'll be on my travels if allowed. If I have any issues I'll get in touch, thank you."* (Rode Heath)
- A Boater told us they are swabbed twice a week until they are eligible for the vaccine. Five Boaters with permanent moorings all registered at Nantwich surgeries and have had first vaccine. (Overwater Marina, Audlem)
- A couple told us they were returning to Stoke as they had been unable to arrange vaccinations despite four conversations with their GP Surgery. (Wheelock)
- A Boater told us they had had their first Pfizer jab but were now moving on and concerned how to make sure they can get a Pfizer vaccine elsewhere. (Lyme View) - Healthwatch Cheshire advised them to contact their GP and plan ahead for when and where will be offering Pfizer. Advised them of the location of the mass vaccinations sites and if any issues to contact Healthwatch.
- One couple had had their first injections. They remained at their local GP and were on medication which they had arranged to get in 6-monthly lots as they were travelling around. They had dates for their second vaccinations and would be returning to the same venue. They had no plans to move until they had their second vaccine. (Lyme View)
- A couple were not moving and had registered with a local GP and had a c/o address for mail. They had no dates for the second vaccine. Healthwatch Cheshire explained they should contact their local GP and ensure they receive the same vaccine as first time. (Bollington)
- A gentleman had completed forms to register with a Nantwich GP but says he was turned away so phoned another GP surgery and they arranged for him to be vaccinated in Crewe. (Nantwich)
- Healthwatch spoke to a gentleman who said that he had to walk to Middlewich for his jab as there was no bus to get him there. Healthwatch Cheshire discussed community transport links with him, and if any further concerns he could contact the local GP or Healthwatch Cheshire.
- One Boater said he had to make an 8-hour round trip to his own GP in Cornwall to get vaccinated. He said that Police came to interview him for unnecessary travel. (Overwater Marina, Audlem)

- Healthwatch spoke to one Boater who said they had been to the Etihad Stadium in Manchester as it was the first option and having family in that area was easy for them to do. They said it was like being in the army being ordered about, but in a good way. (Jay Narrowboats, Halton)
- A Boater told us they had not had a jab yet as they were under 40, but that they have every intention of having vaccination as they see it as a passport to travel. (Middlewich)

Feedback on other health and care issues:

- *"Watling Street are so helpful thank you."* (Northwich Marina)
- *"When I needed support CWP were not able to provide as I contacted them but then never heard back."* (Tattenhall Marina)
- *"All is good, although on weekends it's so busy with people walking by, it's hard to keep any social distancing."* (Poynton)
- *"I've had my jab and I live on my boat. I worry when people are so close to my boat, especially with the path being so muddy, people get right up to the hard standing."* (Lyme View)
- *"There has been very little Covid outbreak on marina as people tend to keep to themselves."*
- *"Why are you out and about now? Will you keep coming out with other information in the future?"* (Hesford Marina).