

Impact of NHS 111 Online on the NHS 111 telephone service and urgent care system: a mixed-methods study

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Plain English summary

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People use the NHS 111 telephone service to help them decide which urgent care service to use when they need help quickly. Recently, an alternative NHS 111 Online service has been introduced. This allows people to use either a website or a smartphone application (app) to answer a series of questions about their health problem, and it then provides advice about what to do next. It is hoped that this will help improve access to services and reduce demand for the NHS 111 telephone service.

We looked at how well the new online service is working in a number of sites across the country. We found little effect on the telephone service, meaning that people are not using the online service *instead* of telephoning and there could potentially be some extra service demand. More younger people use the online service than older people. A survey of service users found that one-third did not follow the advice provided by the online service and users were less satisfied than those using the telephone service. They did find it helpful and were generally positive but thought that the service could be improved with better questions and perhaps a chat option to connect to a person. The online service has improved access for people who do not want to use the telephone service. Staff were also positive about the online option and had not, so far, experienced an increase in their workload. We compared the cost of the online and telephone services and found that the online service was cheaper but will save money for the NHS only if at least 38% of people who use the telephone service move to the online service instead. Overall, the NHS 111 Online service appears to be a useful way to access urgent care working alongside the telephone service but could not replace it as many people like the human contact of the telephone service. Our findings may change as use increases.

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