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## World Stroke Day raises alarm for ‘second wave’ of pandemic stroke patients

New statistics from the Stroke Association reveal that almost one in three (29%) stroke survivors who had a stroke during the pandemic delayed seeking emergency medical attention due to Covid-19.<sup>(1)</sup> This **World Stroke Day**, the charity is urging the public to act FAST when they see the signs of a stroke and to call 999. By acting FAST, you can help to make sure people get to hospital quickly and to reduce the chances of a stroke survivor being left with a severe disability or even dying.

Act FAST is one of the UK’s most successful public health campaigns and has motivated people to treat stroke as a medical emergency and call 999 when they see the signs and symptoms of a stroke.

Every year there are 100,000 strokes across the UK<sup>(2)</sup>.

Jaimie Shepherd, Network Manager at South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Stroke Hosted Network said: “A stroke is a life-threatening condition and a mini-stroke is a warning sign that a major stroke is likely. By acting FAST you can save lives. Remember, **F**ace – is their face drooping on one side? **A**rms – can they lift them? **S**peech – is their speech slurred? If you spot any **one** of these symptoms then it’s **T**ime to call 999. The quicker your loved one receives the right specialist treatment the better their chances of avoiding long-term disability or death.

“I’d like to reassure people that our specialist stroke units are equipped and ready to treat stroke patients. So the best thing you can do if you see someone showing the signs of a stroke, is to call 999 immediately.”

As the UK deals with a second wave of the pandemic, the charity is highlighting some impacts that Covid-19 has already had on public health and behaviours:

- In the UK, attendances to Emergency Departments were significantly lower. Between April and June 2020 hospital attendances to Emergency Departments almost halved (44.7%) when compared to April to June 2019. This suggests that there are some people with potentially life threatening conditions who are risking their lives by not going to the Emergency Departments.<sup>(3-6)</sup>
- Admissions to hospital stroke units in England, Wales and Northern Ireland continued to remain down. From 23 March to 30 June there were a total of 19,106 stroke admissions. This is a 10.6% (21,379) drop from 1 January to 31 March 2020 and a 13.4% (22,068) drop compared to the same time (April to Jun 2019) last year.<sup>(7)</sup>
- Stroke deaths in care homes were 39% higher than the five-year average in England and Wales, and stroke deaths in private homes doubled (52%), during the Covid-19 surge from mid-March until May.<sup>(8)</sup>
- Despite being most at risk, a third of over 65s said they were likely to put off calling 999 for non-Covid life threatening conditions.<sup>(9)</sup>

As new local restrictions continue to be announced and fears around contracting Covid-19 mount, the Stroke Association is urging the public to treat stroke as the life-threatening condition it is.

Juliet Bouverie, Chief Executive of the Stroke Association says: “We heard from stroke clinicians in the first wave that as the number of reported Covid-19 cases went up, the number of people presenting at A&E with stroke dropped considerably. Strokes haven’t stopped happening, which means that people are in danger of dying at home, and not getting the treatment they need to prevent long-term disability. As we prepare for winter along with the recent increases of Covid-19 cases, we want to ensure that anybody experiencing or witnessing any stroke symptoms dials 999. Stroke is a life-threatening, medical emergency and time lost is brain lost. The quicker you act the more of a person you are likely to save, giving them hope of a better recovery.

“This World Stroke Day we’re living and adapting to a new normal across the globe, just like thousands of stroke survivors do on a daily basis. As new lockdown restrictions are put in to place across different areas around the UK, everybody needs to know the signs of a stroke by using the FAST test (Face Arms Speech Time to call 999). A stroke can strike anyone at any time. It could happen to you or someone you love, so as a community let’s not forget those people who may be living alone. The NHS remains open and equipped to treat stroke patients. It’s vital that anybody who may be having a stroke is given the best chance of recovery because you acted FAST.”

Symptoms such as facial drooping, arm weakness and speech difficulties are the most common, (but not exclusive), signs of a stroke. The signs of a TIA/mini-stroke are the same as a stroke, but leave within 24 hours. A TIA/mini-stroke is a sign that a full stroke could be on the way.

Other signs of stroke can include:

- Sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the body, including legs, hands or feet.
- Difficulty finding words or speaking in clear sentences.
- Sudden blurred vision or loss of sight in one or both eyes.
- Sudden memory loss or confusion, and dizziness or a sudden fall.
- A sudden, severe headache.

If you spot any one of these signs of a stroke, don't wait. Call 999 straight away.

For more information about stroke and the Act FAST campaign go to [www.stroke.org.uk/fast](http://www.stroke.org.uk/fast).

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- Stroke strikes every five minutes in the UK and it changes lives in an instant.
- The Stroke Association is a charity working across the UK to support people to rebuild their lives after stroke. We believe that everyone deserves to live the best life they can after stroke. From local support services and groups, to online information and support, anyone affected by stroke can visit [stroke.org.uk](http://stroke.org.uk) or call our dedicated Stroke Helpline on 0303 3033 100 to find out about support available locally.
- Our specialist support, research and campaigning are only possible with the courage and determination of the stroke community and the generosity of our supporters. With more donations and support, we can help rebuild even more lives.
- You can follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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