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NHS Foundation Trust

Pulmonary embolism: Virtual Acute Care Unit

This leaflet is for patients who are discharged home following diagnosis of a pulmonary embolism (PE), and who require ongoing monitoring by the Virtual Acute Care Unit (VACU).

VACU telephone: 0118 322 5201 (8am-8pm, Mon-Sun)
VACU email rbb-tr.vhs@nhs.net
Out of hours: 111 or 999



What is the Virtual Acute Care Unit?

- VACU is a hospital service that helps you recover safely at home, after an illness or flare-up, while still having access to hospital support if you need it. This may reduce the chance of complications or needing to return to hospital
- Your clinician says you are well enough to leave hospital safely, but that you need short-term follow-up from the healthcare team.
- The follow-up you receive will depend on your condition and how you are recovering. Some patients may have individual needs for daily hospital treatment or monitoring at first.
- You will receive regular telephone calls with a clinician and will need to return to our unit for blood tests until your levels are satisfactory. If you do become more unwell, the VACU team will ensure you receive appropriate and timely treatment.

What is a pulmonary embolism?

A pulmonary embolism is a blood clot in the lungs. This can cause symptoms such as:

- Sudden shortness of breath
- Chest pain (often worse when breathing in)
- Fast heartbeat
- Cough (sometimes with blood)
- Feeling dizzy, faint, or very unwell

A pulmonary embolism can be serious, but with the right treatment most people recover well.

What will happen after I go home?

Once you return home, a member of the VACU team may call to:

- Check your symptoms and to check for any side effects of your treatment, until we determine you are getting better.
- Ask for your readings, this can include oxygen levels, heart rate and blood pressure (you are encouraged to record these using the table overleaf).
- Arrange an appointment slot for blood tests to monitor your infection markers.

***Please be aware, our call to you may come from a withheld or unknown number.**

Below is a table you may wish to use, to monitor your observations:

	Morning			Midday			Afternoon			Evening		
	Oxygen	Heart rate	Blood pressure	Oxygen	Heart rate	Blood pressure	Oxygen	Heart rate	Blood pressure	Oxygen	Heart rate	Blood pressure
Day 1												
Day 2												
Day 3												
Day 4												
Day 5												

Your blood thinning medications

General considerations

- Blood thinners will **increase your risk of bleeding**, so avoid injuries, e.g., contact sports. Even small cuts will continue to bleed for some time. Apply consistent pressure to the wound, for 5-10 minutes, if it does not stop bleeding with 20 minutes of pressure, seek medical advice.
- Blood thinners can **interact with other medications** (including over-the-counter supplements), so speak to your GP or Virtual Acute Care Unit staff prior to making any changes.
- Blood thinners may **not be safe in pregnancy**, so speak to your doctor if you are pregnant or are planning on becoming pregnant.

For Apixaban (Eliquis)

- Take 10 mg of Apixaban twice a day for the first 7 days (you may have started taking this while in hospital).
- Reduce your dose to 5mg twice a day after 7 days.
- Remain on 5mg twice a day for at least 3 months, until you are seen by a lung doctor.
- Contact your GP for a repeat prescription.

For Tinzaparin injections

- Inject this under the skin, into a site where there is adequate “fatty tissue” such your stomach or the tops of the thighs

- Inject this at roughly the same time every day.
- Vary the injection site daily.
- Contact your local council to arrange collection of a full sharps bin.

For Warfarin

- Your warfarin dose will be depend upon your individual blood test results (INR).
- Please follow any guidance you received upon discharge from hospital, regarding where and when to have a repeat blood test so that your INR may be checked..

Alarm signs and what to do next

Seek help via our Virtual Acute Care Unit number, 111 or 999 in the following cases:

- If your oxygen saturations are persistently 94% or less (see instructions on use of equipment below).
- If the top number of your blood pressure is persistently less than 100.
- If your heart rate is persistently greater than 110.
- If you are more short of breath since leaving hospital.
- New/worsening dizziness or light-headed.
- If you develop new/worsening chest pain.
- If you have uncontrolled bleeding or black bowel movements.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to call our Virtual Acute Care Unit number – we are happy to help as we know the symptoms can be alarming.

0118 322 5201

Are you a carer?

Carers give unpaid care to a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is committed to recognising their valuable role. If you would like any additional support or information please speak to our team or visit our Carers Support webpage. www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/accessible-information-and-reasonable-adjustments/carers-support

Instructions for using the equipment

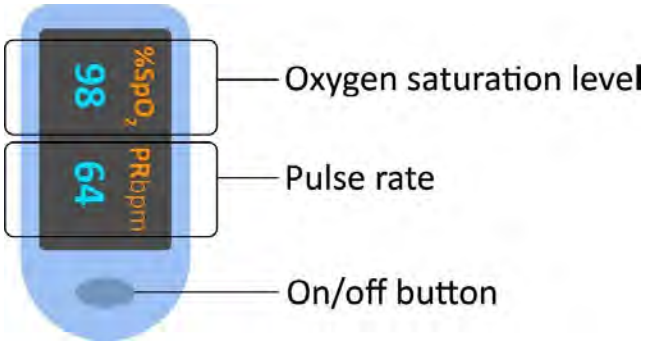
The VACU team may give you some equipment to use at home. This may include a pulse oximeter, a blood pressure monitor and a temperature probe.

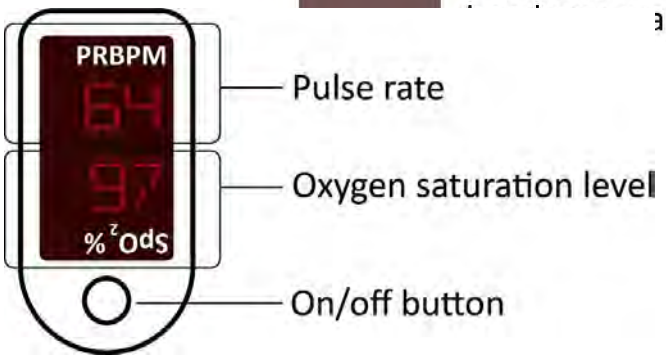
The clinician looking after you will let you know what readings they need, and how often. You can write these down, and let us know when we phone you.

Instructions for using your pulse oximeter at home

- Make sure your fingers are warm.
- Remove any nail varnish before attaching the probe.
- Clip the oximeter onto your finger.
- Sit up straight and rest for a few minutes before taking measurements.
- After 5-10 seconds, the probe will give you two different numbers - an oxygen saturation level (abbreviated to SpO2) and a pulse rate (abbreviated to PR or BPM) - we are interested in both readings.

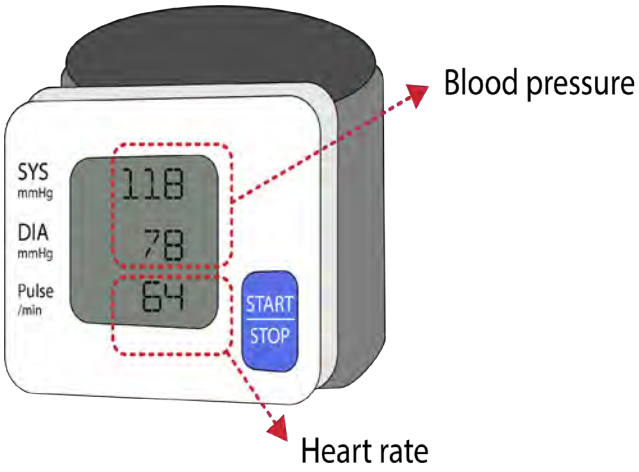






Using your blood pressure monitor at home

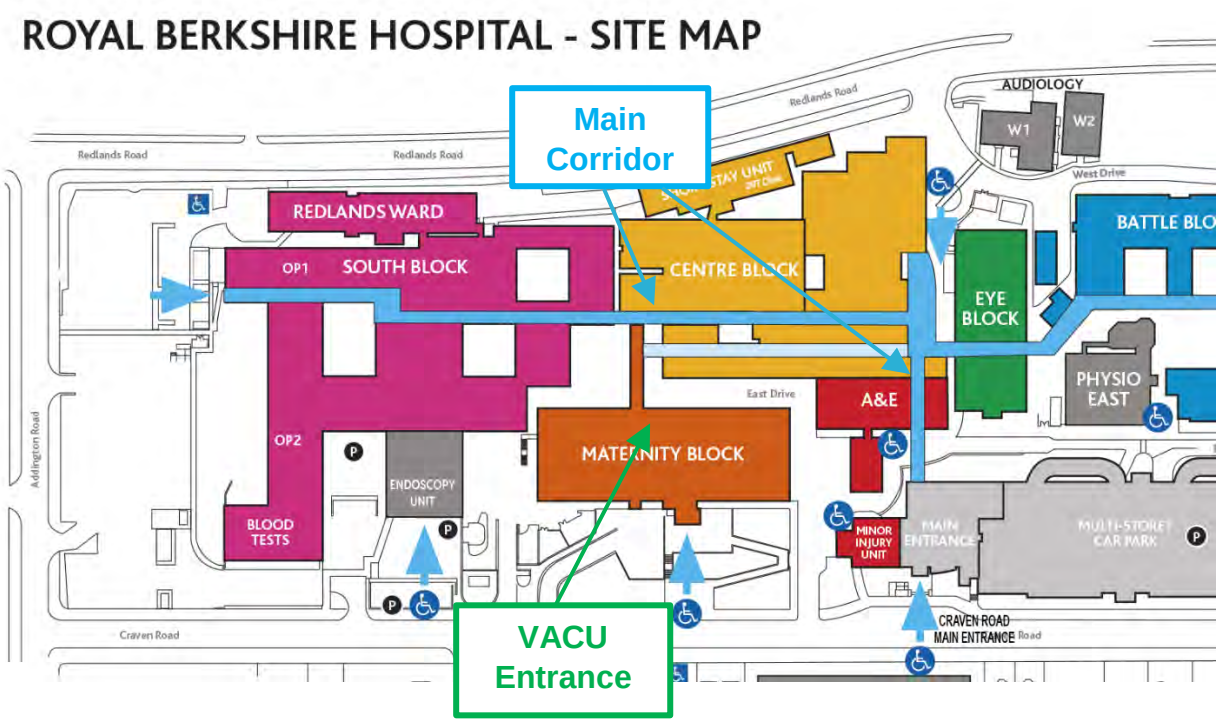
- Ensure you are seated comfortably and rest for a few minutes before taking the readings.
- Attach the cuff to your upper arm, against your skin (and not over clothing).
- Press the START/STOP button to start measuring your blood pressure – the cuff will pump up, which may feel a bit uncomfortable for a short period.
- The monitor will give you three readings.
- The top two readings are your blood pressure.
- The bottom number is your heart rate.
- You can view the full instruction manual by searching online for "Omron RS1 manual".



Returning the devices

Once you have recovered, please return any devices VACU has provided to the drop-off box located in the Virtual Acute Care Unit in **Maternity Block, level 2** – see map below.

Open Mon-Sun, 8am-8pm. **Please do not return them to the Emergency Department (A&E).**



To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Virtual Acute Care Unit
Reviewed: November 2026. Next review due: November 2028.