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To: Social Care Sector Copied to: Chief Officers HSCPs, Executive Nurse Leads, Chief Social Work Officers, Chief Executives NHS Boards and Local Authorities Directors of Public Health

10 December 2021

Dear Colleagues

WINTER RESPONSE – SELF- ISOLATION FOR SOCIAL CARE STAFF

Following the Workforce Senior Leadership Group today, colleagues sought urgent clarification on self-isolation arrangements for social care staff. Given the imminent application of new arrangements, I am writing to you this evening to make sure you have the information you need.

As you will be aware the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is increasing in prevalence and it is extremely likely there will be many more cases confirmed in the coming days. In light of this emerging threat the First Minister this afternoon outlined enhanced measures with regard to self-isolation for the general public which will come into effect tomorrow (11th December) which states

"all <u>household</u> contacts of any confirmed coronavirus (COVID 19) cases must isolate for 10 days regardless of vaccination status - even if they initially get a negative PCR test"

An evidence paper on omicron was published to explain the background to the changes announced. <u>omicron-scotland-evidence-paper.pdf</u>

Self-isolation for Social Care Staff

Within social care a high number of staff isolating would put additional pressure on already fragile services, therefore, we would like to emphasise that *current guidance* for social care (and healthcare staff) should still be applied with one important addition <u>DL(2021)24 - Update on</u> *isolation exemptions for Health and Social Care staff (scot.nhs.uk)*

This existing isolation policy for staff who are household or passing contacts of covid-19 positive cases, exempts them from the requirement to self-isolate for 10 days when they:

- are double-vaccinated;
- are asymptomatic and remain asymptomatic,
- undertake PCR test (which returns a negative test result before returning to work), and;
- undertake daily LFD testing for the remainder of the 10 day period.

An important addition to this is that staff must be

double vaccinated and had their booster

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In accordance with the terms of this existing policy and the new addition, staff are ordinarily expected to return to work if they meet the conditions above and comply with the testing requirements set out.

This **replaces** the advice that was issued in a letter from Dr Graham Ellis and Anne Armstrong yesterday 9th December which outlines that staff, if informed by test and protect to be a close contact of omicron, will have to self-isolate.

To avoid confusion social care providers do not have to seek permission from local Health and Social Care Partnership/oversight partners to follow this guidance or seek approval from the Scottish Government.

Where conditions cannot be fulfilled for exemption as a close contact (e.g. the staff member is not doubly vaccinated/has had their booster, they do not have a negative PCR result or, for whatever reason decline a PCR test or they have COVID symptoms) the staff member must not attend for work and is expected to complete self-isolation for 10 days following exposure.

This also applies to healthcare staff and a letter has been issued to the NHS to outline these arrangements.

Staff Support Fund

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind colleagues that the staff support fund for social care remains in place <u>Coronavirus (COVID-19): social care staff support fund guidance - gov.scot</u> (www.gov.scot) this includes support for a number of areas including:

- Backfill/over time to cover when a member of staff is off with COVID/self-isolating in line with public health advice;
- Top up payment for staff who are put upon statutory sick pay when being asked to selfisolate in line with public health advice;
- Backfill to allow other staff to attend vaccine centre to get vaccination/booster

Wellbeing Hub

I would also like to highlight the staff wellbeing *hub <u>Home - National Wellbeing Hub for those</u> working in <u>Health and Social Care</u> which has a number of resources for staff to access.*

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity again to thank social care staff for their continued hard work and compliance with protection measures.

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Donna Bell Director, Mental Wellbeing and Social Care





