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Registered supported housing providers
Social Care staff working in supported housing

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Directors of Public Health,
Executive Directors of Nursing
ARHAI Scotland, Public Health Scotland, Care
Inspectorate, Scottish Care, CCPS, COSLA

16 December 2021

Dear Colleagues

First Minister's Parliamentary COVID-19 statement - Updated advice for supported housing settings

We want to provide you with updated guidance on visiting and social activities within supported housing settings. This follows the First Minister's Parliamentary COVID-19 statement this week, relating to further population based guidance and measures to take effect from midnight on Friday (17 December) to stem the flow of transmission of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2.

As you will appreciate this is a fast moving situation as updated estimates of Omicron's transmissibility in Scotland and vaccine response emerges.

The guidance announced by the First Minister on 14 December 2021, for the general public was as follows:

When socialising at home or in indoor public places individuals should limit the number of households represented in your group to a maximum of three households at any time, with everyone encouraged to take a lateral flow test before meeting.

Additional protective measures for supported housing

As detailed in [guidance for visiting supported housing settings](#), supported housing settings are individuals' homes. Unless providers are registered through the Care Inspectorate as Adult Care Homes and therefore following Open with Care and care home specific guidance, those living in these settings continue to be advised to follow guidance for the general public. This includes advice on limiting the number of households meeting at any time. We are aware some supported housing providers facilitate and support visits by friends and family to supported individuals who live in the tenancy.

Providers who have a role in supporting visiting should:

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- **continue to support indoor visits for their tenants.** However in line with the recommendation for the general public announced on 14 December 2021 to limit the number of households meeting indoors to three, we **recommend that there should be no more than two households meeting with a tenant at one time.**
- There is no requirement to cancel any plans already made for tenants' main festive celebration – whether that takes place on Christmas Day, Christmas Eve, Boxing Day or another day over the festive period. There are no limits to the number of households gathering for that main celebration. However, to make the festive celebrations as safe as possible:
 - take LFD tests before you meet
 - keep groups as small as possible
 - keep a safe distance from those not in your household, especially indoors
 - no one with symptoms or in self-isolation should attend
 - practice good hand hygiene
 - keeping rooms well ventilated
- There should be no restrictions placed on frequency of visiting, unless tenants are self-isolating or there is an outbreak, in which case guidance from test and protect should be followed
- continue to encourage supported people, unless it would cause harm or distress, and their friends and family to take LFD tests prior to social interactions, as an additional layer of protection to all.

The additional protective measures outlined above aim to balance the current Covid-19 risk and the need to keep people safe in line with clinical advice provided about the risks of Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 at this time, and what actions may help reduce the risk of infection or spread of infection. However they are based on the principle that, where it is safe to do so, people living in **supported housing settings should continue be supported to see and spend time with those important them.** Social care staff have worked hard to increase opportunities for people to more safely connect with others, recognising that this is essential to the wellbeing of both supported people and their families / friends.

Activities within shared spaces in supported housing settings

As detailed in [Covid-19 supported housing guidance](#) there are a variety of different types of communal spaces within these settings. For the purpose of this guidance, communal areas are accessible areas and can be used by multiple households, including multiple group tenancies, and/or can be used by the public. Providers should consider the functionality of the communal area, including who accesses it and how it is being accessed to inform the application of guidance and regulations. The Scottish Government [rules and guidance on how to stay safe and help prevent the spread of COVID-19](#) has been updated to include additional measures in response to the threat of Omicron. It includes guidance for the general public and links to sector specific guidance including hospitality.

Advice for staff on activities and encounters

With positive cases of the Omicron variant continuing to rise in Scotland, staff are asked to be especially careful at this time of year.

For your own protection, as well as that of your friends and family, colleagues and those you support, you will want to think about limiting social encounters in line with guidance for the general public. Attending social events, such a large gatherings, could increase your own risk of being infected or of bringing infection to the home. The risk of either catching the virus

or passing it on to others remains very high given the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2. If you do meet people socially or attend social events, as outlined by the First Minister on 14 December 2021, please LFD test and encourage those you are meeting to also test before you meet.

Wherever possible, vehicle sharing should be avoided with anyone outside of household or support bubbles. Where this can't be avoided the advice in the [winter respiratory addendum](#) should be followed. As required by the law, in line with the general public, unless exempt, staff must also wear face coverings if they are travelling on public transport.

We also continue to encourage staff and supported people to get their booster vaccination as soon as possible as it will extend the protection gained from the first two doses and help reduce the risk of you needing to go to hospital due to coronavirus this winter.

The changing nature of the pandemic can mean that the law can quickly change. It is important that individual providers continue to check and comply with all legal obligations on them to be sure the supported housing setting is a safe place to visit and with any health and safety or other obligations in respect of it being a safe workplace. This guidance does not supersede or provide any advice on those matters. Independent advice should be sought on compliance with any of these matters if needed.

Finally, this is an evolving picture and it is likely that we will need to provide you with updated advice. In an effort to support adult social care providers to be kept up to date on guidance and protective measures in relation to winter transmission and Omicron we have [condensed the guidance issued in letters since 9 December 2021 into one webpage](#). This webpage will be regularly reviewed and updated as required. Additionally we are in the process of updating Scottish Government and NHS inform webpages to reflect recent advice issued on:

- [social care and community based testing overview](#)
- [Self-isolation for social care staff](#)
- [NHS inform guidance on exemption for self-isolation](#)

Please check the web links as these will be updated regularly

In the meantime, we would like once again to thank you and your staff for the exceptional work you are doing in responding to the pandemic.



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