



To: Managers of all Care Homes in Scotland
By Email.

24 June 2020

Dear Colleague

We have written to all care home staff today to thank them for their hard work – at all times, but particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you too. The organisations which you lead have shown continued commitment and dedication to ensuring person-centred high quality care and support which is greatly appreciated by the many for whom a care home is their home.

Covid-19 is extremely infectious – and its effects have been devastating, especially in the care home setting. The infection can be passed very easily from person to person in public spaces (especially indoors) and close contact increases that risk. It can also present very differently in the elderly, making it harder to identify. We have continued to follow the science and are now seeing emerging evidence that people who do not have any symptoms and test positive, may in fact be what is termed ‘pre-symptomatic’. This means that these people may in fact be passing the virus on without knowing.

Thank you for your understanding on the need for weekly Covid-19 testing of staff in the care home setting. We realise this presents an additional logistical burden for you at a difficult time. The purpose is to enable identification of any staff who do not have symptoms but are carrying the virus and therefore might unknowingly pass it on. We can then test residents where it is appropriate to do so, to keep residents, staff and the families of staff safe. The continued use of personal protective equipment and strict adherence to infection prevention and control procedures will reduce the risk of transmission to residents or staff – but it won’t take it away entirely.

We would like to thank you if your care home has participated in staff testing already, and if you have not yet participated we would ask you to do so now.

Although infection rates are slowly improving across Scotland, it is possible that there may be a second ‘peak’. Weekly testing of staff in care homes will help us to identify whether infection rates are climbing and help us to continue to suppress the virus. This is a key part of Scotland’s “Test and Protect” strategy and you will be playing a hugely important part in it.

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Recently we were made aware that receiving statutory sick pay when isolating was causing financial hardship for social care workers including those in the care home sector. This week we are introducing the Social Care Staff Support Fund. This Fund will ensure that social care workers receive their normal pay when, due to the nature of their work or work environment, they self-isolate as part of infection, prevention and control measures. The Fund is open to staff who meet the Fund criteria set out in guidance and is intended to remain operational in line with the duration of the Coronavirus No.2 Scotland Act 2020 (2020 Act), currently September 2020. Information on how to access the fund will be published shortly on Scottish Government website here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-social-care-staff-support-fund-guidance/>

Guidance on the weekly staff testing process using the UK Government Social Care Portal method was sent to all NHSScotland Boards on 11 June and is attached here for ease of reference. It covers preparing for and conducting testing, recording and registering tests, booking couriers and packaging tests for the courier. If your care home is not using this method, your Health Board will have informed you of this and what you should do instead to undertake testing. Your local Health and Social Care Partnership will continue to provide support and guidance where required.

Given the progress made in testing staff and residents, we will be soon be in a position to resume visiting in care homes. Successful implementation of testing is a key factor in helping to prepare the way for that important moment and we would like to take this opportunity to provide you with an update on visiting. As you know, we have been unable to reintroduce visiting because the level of transmission in the community, although falling, has meant that it is still not safe. However we have developed a plan for a phased return for when it is clinically safe to do so. We will publish this plan shortly along with guidance. We know that you have been preparing for ways to safely facilitate visits from family and friends. The plan will support you in your continued preparations. We know this will be important news for you, your staff and most importantly the people you care for and their loved ones. We are grateful to Scottish Care for their input into the development of guidance to support a phased return to visiting in care homes which we will share with you shortly.

We know that the residents of care homes and their families and friends are incredibly grateful to you for what you do, as are we. Thank you once again for the part you are playing in keeping them and the staff who care for them safe during the Covid-19 Pandemic.



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