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To registered care home managers - adults
Copy:
Directors of Public Health
Chief Social Work officers
Chief officers
Chief Executives NHS Boards and Local
Authorities NHS Board Nurse and Medical
Directors

25 November 2020

Dear Colleague

Testing Expansion Plan and Care Homes

You may be aware that the COVID-19 Test and Protect Pathways Programme has been considering the best ways to expand testing across adult social care since the announcement of a revised and expanded testing strategy on 23 October. These new testing pathways have been developed with input from care home providers, public health and chief officers and will be finalised over the coming weeks.

The purpose of this letter is to provide more specific detail on the areas of testing within the Testing Expansion Plan as announced by the Cabinet Secretary in Parliament earlier today. Full details of all the areas of testing expansion are attached at the end of this letter for ease of reference.

The Plan will significantly expand testing to designated visitors to care homes and professionals from health and other professions that regularly visit care homes. This additional testing will enhance the existing layers of protection in place for our social care sector, for the people it serves, and for our communities. This expansion is only possible because of increases in our testing capacity and new testing options, particularly lateral flow devices which return a rapid result.

Designated Visitors to Care Homes

A key priority is to make testing available to those designated visitors to care home residents, and we will start to roll this out to early adopter care homes from 7 December. We are currently working with Chief Officers to identify care homes that may wish to be considered as early adopters. This initial phase will include four local authority areas and a minimum of eight care homes in week one, expanding in the following weeks. The purpose of working with early adopters and a phased introduction is to ensure we get the pathway, logistical, training and local support measures for care homes right.



This approach will see the introduction of lateral flow testing for visitors on the day of the visit, at the care home site, so that if a test is positive, family members can take immediate action to isolate and avert the harm that could have arisen.

Testing for designated visitors, using lateral flow devices, will be made available to all care homes from w/c 11 January.

We are very conscious that this is an additional resource request of care homes, at what is already a demanding time, and we will be considering ways to mitigate this in the coming weeks. In addition, we are aware that for some care homes there will not be the space available to support the delivery of lateral flow testing on site, and again we will work with local partners to resolve these challenges during the roll out across all care homes. Detailed guidance on delivery, including information on early adopters and the timing of the roll out, will be made available no later than 7 December.

You all, alongside families and loved ones, will know better than anyone that testing provides an additional layer of protection – not risk-free visiting. No test is 100% accurate, and testing will not replace the other layers of protection needed, including appropriate PPE and strict hand hygiene. However, it is an important additional layer of prevention and assurance to support the safe resumption of visiting.

Christmas Visiting

We will shortly publish Christmas Guidance for care homes that has been developed by the Clinical and Professional Advisory Group. This guidance restates the need to follow existing [guidance](#) on visiting issued on 12th October but also has additional information on IPC in relation to Christmas activities.

It will not be possible to complete a robust roll out of lateral flow testing for designated visitors before Christmas. To ensure that all care homes have access to designated visitor testing to provide an additional layer of protection over the festive period, we have secured PCR testing for care homes. This can be offered in the weeks commencing 21 and 28 December and 4 January.

We are aware that some providers have concerns about the time period between a PCR test and the results, however it is important that this testing is viewed as an additional layer of protection and that there is sufficient confidence in existing safety measures to satisfy these concerns. As with care home staff, who are also tested via PCR, risks are minimised when the PPE and IPC guidance on visiting is adhered to. We would encourage you to work within your local oversight arrangements if you need further advice on current safety measures.

Visiting Professionals

The introduction of testing for all visiting professionals, including public sector, independent contractors or statutory body staff who attend care homes or provide care at home at least twice per week and have to be within one metre of residents, clients or patients will begin in mid-December. The priority will be to roll out testing in areas of higher prevalence in the first instance. This will again be supported by lateral flow testing which will be undertaken by the professionals twice weekly. The responsibility for distribution, testing and recording of results will sit with the professional and their direct employer, but care homes will be able to ask for confirmation of compliance from visiting professionals from late January 2021.

There are many design and delivery details that require to be finalised by the 7 December, at which point detailed and specific guidance will be issued. To support you to communicate with designated visitors, families and relatives we have included a copy of a letter for care home relatives which you are welcome to share as appropriate.

I hope this is helpful

Donna Bell

Donna Bell
Director of Mental Health and Social Care

Annex A – Testing expansion implementation – Summary timeline

Annex B – Copy of letter for care home visitors

	commencing with those areas in Levels 3 and 4 first.	
7. Higher & Further Education Students	30 November 2020	Expected to conclude on 9 December 2020. Further phase of testing being planned for student return in January 2021.
8. Community Asymptomatic Testing	Early December 2020	Mid December 2020 (plan for one week of testing - may be flexibility to extend slightly). Plan to scale up (learning from December initiatives) in the new year in other areas of Scotland – no planned end date.
9. School (staff)	From January 2021 (pathfinders)	End date of pathfinders TBC in discussion with local partners Further roll out beyond that point, considering learning and outcome of pathfinders.

Annex B – Copy of letter to care home visitors

Testing Expansion Plan for Designated Visitors

The Scottish Government's COVID-19 Test and Protect Pathways Programme has been considering the best ways to expand testing across adult social care since the announcement of a revised and expanded testing strategy on 23 October. There has been engagement with clinicians, care homes and visitor and family representatives through various design sessions to build the additional care homes testing pathways.

The purpose of the letter is to provide specific on areas of testing within the Testing Expansion Plan as announced by the Cabinet Secretary in Parliament earlier today.

The Plan will significantly expand testing including to designated visitors to care homes. This additional testing will add again to the layers of protection in place for our social care sector, for the people it serves, and for our communities. This expansion is only possible because of increases in our testing capacity and by new testing options, particularly lateral flow devices.

Designated Visitors

The testing approach for designated visitors will see the roll out lateral flow testing kits to some care homes beginning in December. These tests will largely be administered in Care Homes, immediately before a visit, to mitigate transmission risk as much as possible. We are aware, however, that there may also be instances where Care Homes will be unable to facilitate this for practical reasons.

We are therefore now working quickly with local partners to identify the first early adopter care homes, with the roll out across the country taking place from 11 January. The purpose of the early adopter sites is to work through the logistical issues that we know exist. This is a complex delivery challenge and we need to make sure that this works. Detailed and specific guidance will be published for Care Homes and visitors and families no later than 7 December.

The introduction of lateral flow testing will enhance existing visiting guidance on use of PPE and IPC to support visiting, providing an additional layer of protection. It will not replace the current guidance. No test is 100% accurate, and testing will not replace the other layers of protection needed, including appropriate PPE and strict hand hygiene. Local Care Home visiting arrangements will remain the responsibility of the Care Home alongside their local public health teams that will review risks.

Christmas Visiting

It will not be possible to roll out lateral flow testing to across all of Scotland's care homes by Christmas.

To ensure that all care homes have access to designated visitor testing to provide an additional layer of protection over the festive period, we have secured PCR testing for care homes not participating as an early adopter. This can be offered in the weeks commencing 21 and 28 December and 4 January.

Again please note that detailed and specific guidance on the process will be published for Care Homes and visitors and families no later than 7 December. In the meantime we will

shortly publish Christmas Guidance for care homes with advice visiting over Christmas. This guidance restates the need to follow existing [guidance](#) and arrangements on visiting issued on 12th October but also has additional information on IPC in relation to Christmas activities. The guidance will be published [here](#).

Today's announcement is a welcome development, adding an additional layer of protection for residents, families, friends and staff. We will provide further information about next steps as soon as we can.

