Guidance for care homes on regular testing and what to do in outbreak situations

Testing for COVID-19 is an essential part of the strategy for reducing infections in care homes. Arrangements for testing will be different depending on whether it is regular whole home testing, or testing in response to a possible COVID-19 case.

How should I arrange testing?

Does anyone in your care home have symptoms?

No

Regular testing pathway*
Arrange regular whole home testing via the national programme:
- test staff on day 14
- test staff and residents on day 28
Test all staff and residents over the course of 24-48 hours (test all the residents in the first 24 hours).

Yes

Suspected case: outbreak testing pathway
Resident has symptoms: arrange an immediate test via Trust
Staff member has symptoms: arrange an immediate test via local Trust, if relevant, or one of the 12 testing centres in Northern Ireland. To book, go to: www.pha.site/testing-covid19

Confirmed case: outbreak testing pathway
Notify PHA/Trust - PHA will carry out a risk assessment and advise on a schedule of whole home testing done via the Trust.

Positive test returned
Move to outbreak testing pathway.

Test result unclear
If a test result is returned as unclear or missing at day 7, repeat the test within 24 hours via the national programme.

All tests negative
Continue regular testing at 14/28 day intervals via the national programme.

Note: Regular testing involves use of national programme laboratories. Do not send these swabs to the Regional Virology Lab. Regular testing does not include pre-admission testing or any requested tests that require a result in 48 hours. These should be completed via Trust testing.

If someone in your home has symptoms or if regular testing returns a positive case

- Contact the GP of affected residents if necessary to arrange clinical assessment.
- Contact the Public Health Agency (PHA) Duty Room on 0300 555 0119 or by email to: PHA.DutyRoom@hscni.net – whether an outbreak is declared or not, the PHA Duty Officer will progress a risk assessment with the care home and advise staff of what further action(s) are required.

Please note all contacts remain the same for seven day service.

What to do if someone tests positive a second time

If a resident or staff member has tested positive for COVID-19, either in regular testing or as part of an outbreak, they should not be retested for a minimum period of 90 days. After 90 days they can be included in the next round of regular whole home testing.

If the resident or staff member tests positive for a second time, you should contact your Trust care home support team. Trust staff will arrange a further swab and, based on this result, PHA Duty Room staff will advise on management on a case by case basis.

For regular testing courier or results, contact 119.

All staff are welcome to contact PHA carehometesting@hscni.net for any other queries or feedback.