PCR Testing for COVID-19

Information for Care Partners

Northern Ireland – February, 2021

Version 1

Contents[1]

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[1] This document was adapted for NI from NHS UK Government Guidance issued on 8th December 2020

Introduction

This document provides information for care partners who will be offered weekly testing for COVID-19 in care homes.

The primary goal of testing is to protect care home residents, care partners and staff from COVID-19 infection so please read the information provided in this booklet carefully.

Testing is important as it can identify people who might be carrying COVID-19 but may not be not showing any symptoms such as a temperature, new cough or loss of taste or smell. Anyone testing positive will be asked to isolate which will significantly reduce the risk of ongoing spread to the care home or the wider community.

Whilst testing may reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, it does not completely remove the risk of infection. Everyone must continue to maintain Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures such as regular hand washing, wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and maintaining social distancing,

By carefully following the steps described below you will be playing your part in helping to protect not just your loved one, but all the people with whom they share their home, from the risk of infection.

The care home manager and staff will be able to discuss the testing process with you and answer any questions that you may have.

What is a Care Partner?

The role of a care partner is complementary to that of the care home staff. A care partner is generally a close family member or friend who has a long standing relationship with a resident and plays an essential role on a regular basis on maintaining a resident's health and wellbeing. Care provided by a care partner is individualised and tailored to the needs of the resident and may include roles such encouraging a resident to eat and drink.

Information related to the role of care partners is available at:

https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2021-01/Care%20Partner%20Leaflet.pdf

PCR testing for COVID -19 in Care Homes

Regular testing for COVID-19 for all staff and residents has been in place since the August 3rd 2020. Staff are tested every week and residents every 28 days. Regular testing of people with no symptoms is very important as it identifies potential outbreaks early so that they can be managed quickly to prevent further spread.

Any residents or staff members with symptoms of COVID-19 are tested immediately and they are also asked to isolate until the test results are available.

COVID-19 testing in care homes uses polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology. These tests detect disease by looking for traces of the virus' genetic material on a sample collected via a nose and/or throat swab.The PCR test is very accurate and is the standard test for COVID-19. The PCR test has to be processed in a laboratory and the results are usually available within 48 hours.

Do I have to be tested in order for me to visit my relative?

Testing is very important to help us to identify people who might be carrying COVID-19 but not showing symptoms. Testing may not identify everyone that is currently infectious, but alongside wearing PPE and following other infection prevention and control measures, testing helps us to keep our care home and your loved ones safe.

If you do not want to participate in the weekly testing programme, please discuss this with your care home manager.

Can I visit if there is an outbreak in the care home?

In the event of an outbreak in a care home, care partners may still be allowed to visit.

Should you wish to continue to visit during an outbreak, please discuss this with your care home manager to agree any necessary additional precautions.

Before your visit

At all times, to keep your loved one and the care home safe, we ask that you please follow the guidelines below.

- Stay home if you're feeling unwell, including if you have a fever, a cough or a change in your sense of taste or smell and arrange to have a test (see section on page 5 on what to do if you develop symptoms).

- Follow national guidance outside of your care partner sessions, including limiting your contact with other people and wearing a face covering in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult, and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet.

- Observe social distancing with anyone outside of your household or bubble and wash your hands regularly.

What do I do if I develop symptoms?

Symptoms of COVID19 include a new/continuous cough, and/or high temperature, and/or loss of or change to taste or smell.

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 or any other infection should not visit the care home, even if their symptoms are mild and unconfirmed. If you have symptoms you should stay at home, organise to get tested and isolate with your household for a minimum of 10 days from onset of symptoms.

- Detailed guidance on what to do and how to book at test is available at

https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public/frequently-asked-questions#if-i-have-symptoms-of-covid-19-what-should-i-do

- Information on isolation is provided at

https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public/frequently-asked-questions#what-does-self-isolation-mean

Tests done at any of the local test centres normally provide a result within 24 hours.

If you are unsure about what to do, please contact your care home.

What happens if I have previously tested positive for COVID-19?

If you have had a previous positive COVID-19 test result it will not stop you from visiting as long as you have completed the recommended isolation period of 10 days and have been free from symptoms for at least 48 hours.

However, if you have previously tested positive for COVID-19, you should not have another PCR test for 90 days unless you become symptomatic. This is because any repeat test may result in a positive result due to the presence of residual (dead) virus within the individual's system, but does not represent active infection with the virus. After 90 days you should continue testing with PCR tests weekly in the care home.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms before the 90 day period is ended, you will need to isolate and arrange to have a COVID-19 PCR test again.

Testing frequency for care partners

Weekly PCR testing for care partners is completed alongside and at the same time as regular staff testing. Care Partners may wish to undertake the swabbing within their own home. If this is the preferred option, then the test must be returned to the care home on the same day as the staff tests are undertaken to facilitate courier collection to the laboratory.

If you as the Care Partner are unable to attend the care home on the day of the weekly staff testing then speak to the care home manager.

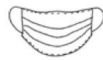| Timing	Test	Registration
Day of regular weekly care home staff testing in the care home	1 x PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) A supply of Test kits (4 maximum) may be distributed to Care Partner by the care home and taken home for self-swab completion on the care home testing day.	• All care partners must be registered on the Care Home portal. This is the same as for Care Home staff testing. • This will be part of the bulk registration but may also be single upload if required

Key steps during PCR Testing for Covid-19

Preparing to get tested –

- When you first enter the home a staff member will provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and support you with putting it on. This will include gloves, mask and apron. More detailed instructions for putting on and taking off PPE are provided on pages 9 & 10 and on the following website. https://youtu.be/9PCqT3aS8d8.

Gloves   Mask   Apron

- You'll be asked to sign a consent form to record that you agree to taking the test and are happy that your personal details are collected so that your test can be registered and the result provided directly to you. This consent will also include permission for the care home to report any positive tests to the duty room in the Public Health Agency (PHA) so that they can complete a risk assessment with the care home.
- If you are undertaking the swab in your own home, you do not need PPE, just wash your hands carefully.

Taking the test (swab)

- A member of staff will direct you to the testing area, they will hand you a packaged swab to do the PCR test.

- A PCR test is completed using a throat and nose swab. The care home will ask you to complete the swabbing yourself, supervised and supported by a trained staff member of staff from the care home. A swab is a small piece of soft, absorbent material on a plastic stick that is used to take a sample from your nose and throat.

- You will then need to take your own throat and nose swab, supervised by a member of staff. They will walk you through how to swab yourself which will only take about 30 seconds to do. See self-swabbing instructions on page 11 for more details on how to swab yourself.

- The swab will be placed in the bag to be returned to the lab for analysis.

Registering your test

All tests need to be registered so that each test can be linked to an individual. Tests will be registered by the care home along with the rest of the staff tests.

During the registration process, your personal details will be uploaded to an electronic testing portal.

You will be asked for your written consent for this to be done as your personal details need to be recorded in order for you to get your result.

As test results are personal information no care partner should be compelled to provide consent for sharing of PCR test result.

A manual record of your tests and results will also be kept by the care home with your consent.

Details needed for the online registration form include:

- Full name
- Date of birth
- Health and Care Number
- Gender
- Ethnic group
- Home address
- Contact details (including mobile number and e-mail address)
- The barcode number of your test kit
- Date and time of your test

Receiving your result

PCR tests for COVID-19 are sent to the laboratory for analysis.

You will receive the results of the PCR test in 48 hours via e-mail, text message, or by the care home manager if you give consent for this. If you receive a positive result, it is important that you inform the care home manager and isolate with all members of your household as outlined in the table overleaf.

Test results

Test results	Action
COVID-19 negative	Visit can proceed
COVID-19 positive	If your **PCR COVID-19 test is positive** – you, along with your household/close contacts must isolate for 10 days from the date your test was taken in line with regional guidance[3]. Please inform your care home manager Rebook another visit after isolation period completed. A more detailed risk assessment will be undertaken if you return a positive PCR test <u>and</u> there are also other positive test results in the care home around the same time. Information collected may include: • The dates and times of your visits • Information on who you were visiting along with their test results and assessment of any possible symptoms of COVID-19 • Interaction with any other care home staff • Your movement throughout the home during visits • Your movements and contacts outside of the home to ascertain where you may have come into contact with the infection e.g. close contact from another positive case

Note: If you become symptomatic at any stage AFTER a negative COVID-19 test, you still MUST self-isolate and book a further test[2]; You should NOT visit the care home unless you have received a negative COVID-19 result or have completed 10 day isolation period.

1. Regional guidance on staying safe: https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-safe-outside-your-home
2. What to do if you have COVID-19 symptoms: https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public/frequently-asked-questions#if-i-have-symptoms-of-covid-19-what-should-i-do
3. What isolating means: https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public/frequently-asked-questions#what-does-self-isolation-mean

Instructions for putting on PPE

1

Perform hand hygiene using soap and water or alcohol hand gel.

2

Put on a plastic apron and tie it at the waist.

3

Put on a surgical face mask, positioning upper straps on the crown of your head, lower strap at nape of neck. With both hands, mould the metal strap over the bridge of your nose.
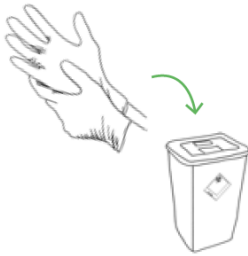
4

Put on plastic gloves.

You are now ready to enter the care home testing area.
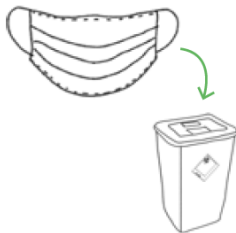
Instructions for removing PPE safely

1

Remove gloves; grasp the outside of the cuff of the first glove and peel off, holding the glove in the gloved hand, insert the finger underneath and peel off second glove.

2

Snap or unfasten apron ties at the neck and let the apron fold down on itself. Break ties at waist and fold apron in on itself – do not touch the outside – this will be contaminated. Discard apron.

3

Remove surgical mask carefully, and put into clinical waste.

4

Perform hand hygiene using soap and water or alcohol hand gel or rub.

Self -swabbing Instructions

You may remove your face mask to self-swab.

1 Using the mirror to help, look inside your mouth, and find your tonsils at the back of the throat. Your tonsils or where they would be (if they had not been removed) are where you will swab your sample.

2 **Gently blow your nose into a tissue**
Throw the used tissue into the clinical waste bin provided.
This is so that you get rid of excess mucus.

3 **Use hand sanitiser to clean your hands.**
This is so that you do not contaminate the test kit.

4 Handle   Soft tip
A member of staff will hand you a packaged swab.
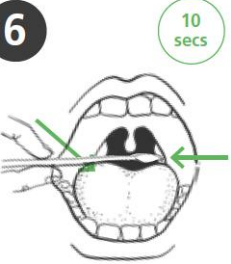Identify the soft, fabric tip of the swab.

5 **Peel open the package from the handle-side of the swab and gently take it out.**
This will be used for both throat and nose. Do not touch the soft tip of the swab.

Note: Do not touch your tongue, teeth, cheeks, gums, or any other surfaces with the fabric tip of the swab. The swab is invalid if it touches these parts, and you will need to get a new swab. If this happens ask a member of staff to get assistance.

The swabbing may feel uncomfortable. Do not insert the swab any deeper if you feel strong resistance or pain. If there is blood or vomit on the swab sample, please alert a member of staff.

6 10 secs
Holding the swab in your hand, open your mouth wide and rub the fabric tip of the swab over both tonsils (or where they would have been) at the back of the throat with good contact **at least 3 times** (use a mirror to help you do this).
Carefully remove the swab stick from the back of your throat.

7 10 secs
Put the same end of the same swab gently into one nostril until you feel a slight resistance (about 2.5cm or 1 inch up your nose).
Roll the **swab 5 times** along the the inside of the nostril.

8 **After collecting the sample hold the swab upright in your hand, do not put it down, and notify a staff member.**
Be careful not to touch any surfaces with the swab.

You are ready to hand back your swab.

Please notify a member of staff and use hand sanitiser after handing in your sample. Put your face mask back on for the rest of your visit.