

By e-mail

Nursing and Residential Care Homes

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14 June 2021

Dear Care Home Manager

Self-test Lateral Flow Device (LFD) Testing for Visitors to Care Homes in Northern Ireland

Further to correspondence from Dr McBride, Chief Medical Officer of 14 June, this letter and attached documentation outlines the actions that Care Homes should now put into place to implement self-testing for COVID-19 using Lateral Flow Devices for Visitors to Care Homes in Northern Ireland.

Regular self-testing using LFDs can help us slow the spread of COVID-19 by identifying those who are infectious so that they can isolate promptly. The tests are voluntary however, the more people who participate in the testing programme the more likely we are to identify individuals who may be positive but not have symptoms.

Please read the documentation carefully and encourage all visitors over the age of 16 to your Care Homes to participate in this LFD testing programme. Care Partners should continue to participate in weekly PCR testing alongside Care Home staff.

Arrangements have been made with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) London to facilitate visitors to all Care Homes in Northern Ireland to access a supply of Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests. Visitors will be able to use the LFD tests in their own homes twice a week as an additional infection prevention control measure prior to visiting a Care Home. This model of rollout has been informed by the feedback and experience of 15 Care Homes across Northern Ireland who participated in testing the use of LFDs in Visitors to Care Homes.

Improving Your Health and Wellbeing

The tests to be used in this programme come in packs of 7 tests and Care Homes are asked to provide a supply of tests to Visitors who have booked to visit a resident in their Care Home and wish to participate in the visitor testing programme. The number of packs provided to each visitor will be at the discretion of the Care Home manager, based on frequency of visiting. Instructions on how to initiate the programme by drawing down supplies of the LFD tests is included in the attached guidance document.

Care Homes are asked to ensure that all Visitors participating in the programme are provided with clear instructions on how to use the LFD tests and register the result. All visitors will be required to provide informed consent before participating in the programme. Care homes should also provide alternatives where visitors would wish to participate with testing but have been assessed as not being able to complete the testing or result registration process themselves. Options are outlined on page 11 of the guidance document.

More detailed guidance on the steps listed below is included in the attached document which is also available on the PHA website by clicking on the following link:

[Testing for visitors to care homes](#)

- Information about LFD tests
- Scope of LFD testing protocol for visitors to Care Homes
- Drawing down and replenishing stocks of LFD tests
- Frequency of LFD testing
- Raising awareness and encouraging uptake
- Consent to participate
- Supporting familiarisation with the testing process (including supporting Visitors who cannot self-test)
- Results
- Registration of LFD tests
- Supporting visitors who cannot self-test
- Where to get more information
- Managing a positive result
- Record keeping

Information on where to access further information is also included in the guidance document.

Recognising that it will take some time for both visitors and Care Homes to get used to the process, the PHA will host a number of 'Drop-in' clinics for Care Homes via ECHO to add further support. Joining details will be circulated in due course.

Thank you for supporting this initiative.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olive MacLeod". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'O'.

Olive MacLeod
Interim Chief Executive

cc Stephen Bergin, PHA
Rodney Morton, PHA
Brendan Whittle, HSCB