



BY EMAIL
Care Home Managers

*Office of the Director of Public Health
Public Health Agency
4th Floor South
12-22 Linenhall Street
BELFAST
BT2 8BS*

*Tel: 0300 555 0114
Website:
www.publichealth.hscni.net*

Date 22 April 2022

Dear Care Home Manager

UPDATED ASYMPTOMATIC COVID-19 TESTING ARRANGEMENTS FOR CARE HOMES FROM MONDAY 25 APRIL 2022

Thank you for your ongoing commitment and participation in the COVID-19 testing programme for care homes, which has been vital in helping to keep care home residents and staff as safe as possible. The Omicron variant is very infectious and, despite best efforts, can spread quickly in health and social care settings. Testing, alongside other Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) measures, continues to play an important role in keeping residents and staff safe.

We have now entered a different phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst daily case numbers continue to be high, the risk of serious illness, hospitalisation and death for those who contract COVID-19 is now much lower than during previous waves. This is because we have successfully delivered a huge vaccination and first booster programme. A second 'Spring 2022' booster programme is currently underway for individuals who are eligible and we continue to utilise innovative antiviral treatments. These advances will remain key as we move forward together.

The Department of Health published the COVID-19 Test, Trace and Protect Transition Plan on 24 March 2022. The Transition Plan sets out a more targeted approach to testing, with a focus on supporting those at highest risk of serious illness as we move into the next phase of our pandemic response. The Plan is available at the following link:

Improving Your Health and Wellbeing

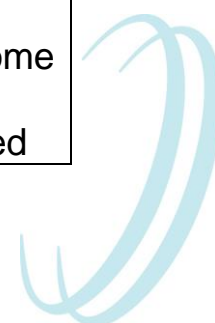


<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/Test-Trace-Transition-Plan.pdf>

The Plan explains that changes will be introduced on a phased basis from 22 April 2022, with further planned changes taking place during a period of transition through to a steady state for testing from the end of June 2022 onwards.

The main purpose of this letter is to provide an update on **asymptomatic testing arrangements** that is, testing of those (staff or residents) who do not have symptoms, which will come into effect from Monday 25 April 2022 onwards. The table below sets out the current asymptomatic testing arrangements in care homes, and the new testing arrangements for those who do not have symptoms, to be deployed from 25 April 2022 onwards.

Group	Current Guidance	New Guidance effective from Monday 25 April 2022
Care Home Residents	Monthly PCR testing.	No regular programme of asymptomatic testing for residents.
Permanent Care Home Staff	Weekly Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing. Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing pre shift.	Testing Pattern: LFD testing to be undertaken twice weekly. LFD tests should be taken 3 to 4 days apart, pre shift. If a member of staff is only working 2 days per week, they should take a LFD test on these days before beginning work. Test Type: SureScreen nasal only test kits.
Agency Staff	LFD test before commencing each shift in any new home (if moving between homes).	Testing Pattern: Should follow the same testing pattern as care home staff if working in a single care home for an extended



Group	Current Guidance	New Guidance effective from Monday 25 April 2022
	LFD testing pre shift, same as permanent staff.	<p>period of time.</p> <p>LFD test before commencing each shift in any new home if moving between homes.</p> <p>Test Type: SureScreen nasal only test kits.</p>
Nominated Care Partners	Weekly PCR testing. LFD testing pre visit.	<p>Testing Pattern: Should follow the same testing pattern as care home staff.</p> <p>Test Type: SureScreen nasal only test kits.</p>
Visitors	LFD test minimum twice weekly.	<p>Testing Pattern: Should undertake twice weekly LFD testing.</p> <p>Test Type: Orient Gene or ACON Flowflex nasal only test kits.</p>
Visiting Professionals (HSC and non-HSC)	LFD test before visiting a care home (1LFD test per day).	<p>Testing Pattern: Should undertake twice weekly LFD testing.</p> <p>Test Type: Orient Gene or ACON Flowflex nasal only test kits.</p>

Care Homes should continue to use the Salesforce channel to place orders for LFD test kits. The type of LFD test kit issued may vary depending on available supplies and regional procurement. Care should be taken to ensure instructions for use are followed which may vary between LFD tests.

Symptomatic testing

Residents with symptoms of COVID-19 should take a lateral flow test at the onset of symptoms (day 0) and take a further LFD test 48 hours later (day 2) if the first test is negative. A PCR test is no longer required.

Staff members who have COVID-19 symptoms should follow the same symptomatic testing protocol as for residents. If symptoms begin at home (off-duty), they should not attend work while awaiting both lateral flow test results. If symptoms begin at work, they should inform their line manager and return home as soon as possible.

All positive tests should continue to be notified to the PHA Health Protection Duty Room.

Testing in an Outbreak

The current testing protocol in place for care homes with a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 outbreak will continue to operate. Updated guidance will issue from the PHA next week which will include further information on operational arrangements, frequency and type of testing for care homes with a COVID-19 outbreak.

Whether a care home outbreak is declared or not, the PHA Duty Room will continue to provide advice on what further action to take.

Care Home Isolation Guidance

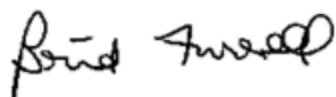
Where appropriate, testing will continue to be advised and undertaken as needed to support isolation periods for care home residents in specific circumstances. The PHA Care Home Isolation Guidance dated 3 February 2022 is currently under review; this guidance document will be updated and reissued to care home providers in due course.

If you have any queries in relation to the content of this communication please contact Trudy.Brown@hscni.net or Wendy.thornton@hscni.net



Thank you for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brid Farrell".

Dr Brid Farrell
Deputy Director of Public Health

cc

SPPG Chief Executive
HSC Trust Chief Executives
RQIA Chief Executive

