

## **Lanarkshire care homes Covid-19 outbreak and surveillance sampling**

### **What is the Scottish Government's testing policy in care homes?**

On 1 May the First Minister announced an extension to polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing for Covid-19 infection in care homes with the aim of reducing viral transmission.

There are three different situations where this testing is carried out:

- Enhanced outbreak investigation in care homes where there are Covid cases, involving testing of all residents and staff, subject to consent, whether or not they have symptoms.
- In a care home with a new or recent case/outbreak which is part of a wider group or chain **and** where staff may be moving between the affected home and other home(s) within the group, carry out urgent testing of residents and staff in the linked home(s).
- Screening in a sample of care homes where there are no cases.

### **What is the benefit of testing?**

Testing all residents and staff in newly identified outbreaks is likely to have the greatest impact in rapidly reducing the risk of ongoing viral transmission. Evidence suggests that infection can spread relatively quickly in care homes unless rapid control measures are implemented.

### **How does outbreak testing work?**

Symptomatic resident(s) or staff should be tested for Covid-19. There should be a low threshold for symptoms (including atypical symptoms) in care home residents.

A single laboratory confirmed Covid-19 positive result is the trigger for starting testing of all residents and staff in a unit/home as appropriate. Extended resident testing will be started by Public Health and carried out by the care home testing team.

Where there is even a single confirmed case of Covid-19 in a resident or staff member, all residents and staff should be tested in:

- A self-contained unit of a care home where there is absolutely no cross-over of staff between units in terms of patient care and/or use of communal staff areas
- The whole care home where units are not self-contained

### **What if staff test positive but have no symptoms?**

On identification of an asymptomatic positive staff member via the Lighthouse Laboratory (Social Care Portal), and where there is no other epidemiological or clinical evidence to suggest there is an outbreak within the care home, further investigation will be carried out and the staff member may be retested by Public Health.

### **What if the care home has an outbreak and staff have been working elsewhere?**

Where a care home with an outbreak is part of a group or chain and staff may still be moving between homes, the Health Protection Team (HPT) will consider if testing is required in any linked homes.

Where a staff member has provided care in another care setting in the previous 72 hours, all residents and staff in the linked home will be urgently screened for symptoms and consideration given to Covid-19 testing:

- Where the care home staff member is **symptomatic or asymptomatic test positive** and has worked in another care home(s) in the previous 72 hours – priority should be given to resident and staff testing in the linked care home.
- Where the care home staff member is **asymptomatic and test negative** and has worked in another care home(s) in the previous 72 hours – risk of transmission is lower and the care home should be closely monitored for early signs of infection. Testing may still be considered.

### **Should testing be repeated?**

The aim of extended testing is to identify outbreaks early, allow control measures to be put in place and ultimately reduce the risk of viral transmission. Undertaking extended testing on a repeated basis during a care home outbreak is not generally necessary.

Testing must be justified and produce benefit to the individual or population group, balanced against any risk of harm or distress that it may cause. Repeated testing of residents in care homes with already well-established outbreaks is less likely to be effective in reducing viral transmission further and is unlikely to alter the outbreak control measures already implemented.

An asymptomatic resident or staff member who goes on to develop new symptoms should be re-tested.

### **How does surveillance sampling work?**

Surveillance sampling involves testing a sample of care home resident for Covid-19 to proactively identify positive cases and prevent/minimise potential outbreaks from occurring. A four-week rolling programme of surveillance sampling of care home residents is in place in Lanarkshire. The sample size depends on the size of the care home.

In October, surveillance sampling moved from a 4-weekly to 6-weekly cycle. This was because the requirement for testing in outbreak situations had significantly increased and this remains the priority for the testing team to allow care home clusters and outbreaks to be managed promptly. Surveillance will be stepped up to 4-weekly again as soon as capacity allows and depending on the care home outbreak situation. Surveillance sampling will be delayed over the next few weeks to allow staff to prioritise administration of the Covid-19 vaccine in care home residents and staff.

Weekly screening of asymptomatic care home staff should continue to ensure positive cases of Covid-19 are identified early.

### **How do I manage a test positive resident or staff member?**

- Asymptomatic test positive residents should be managed as per symptomatic residents and isolated for 14 days from date of test result.
- Asymptomatic staff can continue to work until test results are available (with stringent infection, prevention and control measures in place, including universal use of PPE).
- Staff who test positive (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic) should be excluded from work for 10 days as per existing national guidance. If symptoms develop in an asymptomatic positive staff member, 10-day isolation should re-start from date of symptom onset.
- Asymptomatic test negative staff can continue to work but be vigilant for development of symptoms.
- Household members of test positive staff should self-isolate for 14 days as per national guidance.

### **What about new staff coming into the care home?**

- New staff coming into the care home for the first time where usual staff are being tested, should be screened for symptoms and PCR tested.

- Ideally, testing should be undertaken prior to the planned start date but no longer than 48 hours before.
- Staff can commence work whilst awaiting testing if asymptomatic.
- Test positive staff must be excluded from work for 10 days.

### **How do I access Covid-19 test kits?**

Care homes must notify the HPT promptly on identification of symptomatic residents or staff members so that the need for testing (for public health or clinical management reasons) can be discussed and infection control and outbreak management advice provided.

Each care home in Lanarkshire has been seeded with five Covid-19 test kits for early testing following identification of symptomatic resident(s). Care homes should retain a stock of five test kits at all times. Information on how to access test kits can be found at <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/download/care-home-testing-toolkit/>