

**Deputy Chief Medical Officer**  
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Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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Registered care home providers (adults)  
Adult care home staff

Copied to  
Chief Executives NHS Boards and Local Authorities  
Chief Officers HSCPs,  
Chief Social Work Officers  
Directors of Public Health,  
Executive Directors of Nursing  
ARHAI Scotland  
Public Health Scotland

9 December 2021

Dear Colleagues

### **Minimising the risk of COVID-19 transmission over the winter period**

We want to first of all thank you and all your valued colleagues for your continued resilience and ongoing commitment to supporting people during the pandemic. We recognise how challenging this has been, while managing the ongoing risk of COVID-19 transmission, guidance updates and extreme pressures on resource, and understand that many of your staff may be feeling particularly fatigued after over 20 months of the pandemic. We want to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to you all for supporting each other and working together as we continue to navigate through the pandemic.

We are writing to highlight the measures that you should continue to take to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19, including the new Omicron variant. As you may be aware there is already community transmission of Omicron within Scotland. There is still much to learn about this variant. Questions remain about its severity, transmissibility and response to treatments or vaccines and scientists are working at pace to provide additional information. Until more is known, we must continue to do everything we can to minimise the risk of spreading the infection. We are therefore, urging everyone to do their part and use the tools and guidance we currently have in place to minimise the risk of COVID-19.

### **Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)**

As you know IPC measures, when implemented correctly, are a key safeguard against COVID-19 and other transmittable infections. When IPC measures are relaxed, such as when masks are taken off to use the phone, or people stand closer together, especially in break-rooms, social or work gatherings or whilst car-sharing, the virus is given the opportunity to spread, which can lead to outbreaks. As the winter progresses and we manage the risk of highly infectious variants, it remains crucial that all health and social care staff pay critical attention to and remain compliant with IPC measures. We know the efforts you and your colleagues are taking to follow IPC guidance to keep people safe. However we ask that you consider any areas where this may have relaxed, and that you stringently follow the [guidance contained in the Winter Respiratory IPC Addendum](#). This includes:

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- all staff ensure fluid resistant surgical masks (FRSM) are worn correctly over the nose and mouth at all times unless in situations as detailed in the above guidance
- everyone follows hand hygiene practices including hand washing with liquid soap and use of hand sanitiser when removing face masks, touching surfaces and touch contact with individuals when providing care
- ensuring rooms are ventilated as much and as frequently as possible by opening windows **if** temperature/weather conditions allow. Where weather conditions do not allow for windows being opened, considering if other mitigations can be applied within the area to reduce risk for e.g. where it is safe to do so, doors may be opened
- keeping physically distant from one another, the people you are caring for or supporting, unless providing direct care / support, and their friends and family
- avoiding car-sharing whenever possible
- managers and leaders ensure good compliance with IPC measures through robust risk assessment and governance.

We encourage you all to kindly remind each other of these measures. To support these conversations we have produced posters and social media tools called “kind to remind”. These tools will be available to download from the following webpages by 17:00 on Friday 10 December 2021

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): adult care homes guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-care-homes)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): clinical guidance for the management of clients accessing care at home, housing support and supported housing - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-clinical-guidance-for-the-management-of-clients-accessing-care-at-home-housing-support-and-supported-housing) .

### **COVID Vaccinations and Boosters**

In addition to IPC measures, COVID-19 vaccination has played a vital role in minimising the impact of the virus and the likelihood of severe illness and hospitalisation. We thank all who have completed their two doses of the vaccination and have come forward for their booster.

Current data shows that uptake of the booster for care home staff stands at 53.5%. Levels of protection provided by the vaccination reduce over time, it is therefore incredibly important that when eligible, we all take up offer of the booster. The COVID-19 vaccine booster dose will help extend the protection gained from the first two doses and give longer term protection. You can now get the booster dose and it will help reduce the risk of you needing to go to hospital due to coronavirus this winter.

### **Book your vaccination online: [nhsinform.scot/hscwvaccination](https://nhsinform.scot/hscwvaccination)**

We ask that all staff protect themselves, those they care and support and the wider public by getting their booster. In particular, vaccination remains a key feature of good ante-natal care for health and social care workers.

We also ask that care homes continue to encourage and support their staff to take up the booster. You have an important role to play and we need your help. You are a vital source of trusted information and reassurance to help your colleagues make informed decisions about taking up the vaccine offer.

We understand there may have been some issues with vaccination bookings and appointments. We apologise for the impact this may have had and appreciate your patience while this issue was being rectified. Local teams are doing all that they can to increase the availability of appointments and respond to demand. If you have had previous issues with booking an appointment, we ask that you please try to rebook as soon as possible.

Additionally, drop in appointments should be available in most NHS boards from this week onwards. We recommend you follow your local NHS board Facebook and social media pages to be kept up to date on where the drop in clinics are.

Further information on booking your appointment, including the contact details for the vaccine helpline are available at [NHS Inform](#).

### **Testing**

Continued testing remains critical even when fully vaccinated as people can still catch COVID-19 and spread the infection when vaccinated. Uptake of PCR testing for care home staff is outstanding and we thank staff for continuing to participate in this programme. Early identification of cases is even more important with the new Omicron variant. The evidence emerging is that Omicron has a higher rate of transmission than other variants. This is of particular concern for people living in care homes as they can be more vulnerable to infection. In addition to this communal living settings are at higher risk of outbreaks. **Due to prevalence in the community, we now expect all care home staff to undertake daily LFD testing, in addition to their weekly PCR test.** We also encourage all other social care staff to undertake daily LFD testing. LFD testing helps us to identify asymptomatic positive cases in-between PCR testing which can be used to confirm and identify if the Omicron variant is present.

Please use your existing stock of LFDs first. NSS are putting in place arrangements to provide additional test stocks to care homes. Alternatively, [tests can be collected at your local pharmacy or test centre](#).

We ask that staff log their LFD test result for workplace testing on [the COVID Testing Portal](#). Recording test results (positive and negative) helps us monitor prevalence of the virus and importantly the impact of the virus on the workforce.

### **Test and Protection: Isolation periods**

As you may be aware the First Minister recently announced that all contacts of the Omicron variant will be required to self-isolate for a period of 10 days. We want to confirm to you, that at this time, this also applies to all health and social care staff. If you are contacted and informed by Test and Protect that you are confirmed or suspected close contact of the Omicron variant, you will be unable to exit isolation early with a negative PCR test and daily LFD tests. This does not apply if you are contact traced as a close contact of a COVID-19 positive individual, where the Omicron variant is not suspected.

Details on how you will be contacted by test and protect are available on [NHS Inform](#).

We are conscious that this will create added strain given the current challenges for recruitment and staffing. We are working to see how we can help to further support employers and providers adversely affected by this new requirement.

As per the First Minister's speech earlier this week, this is a rapidly changing situation and the policies will be kept under daily review to reflect what we learn about Omicron.

### **Please follow all instructions from Test and Protect.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your local oversight team. Your local oversight team will continue to risk assess and advise on all outbreaks within care homes, including isolation periods for residents (which will continue to be 14 days rather than 10 days) and named visitors attending care homes.

For further information on isolation periods and outbreaks please see the [Public Health Scotland COVID-19 adult care home guidance](#).

### **Visiting and the festive period**

Finally, we want to reiterate the important impact meaningful contact and socialising with family and friends has on health and wellbeing. We ask that care homes use the protective measures outlined to continue to facilitate and support residents to meet in person with their family and friends, including encouraging and supporting family and friends to test prior to their visit. As detailed in previous communications, the expectation is that visiting should have increased from the minimum of twice weekly, to more normalised visiting, unless an outbreak is suspected or has been declared. Where there is an outbreak, the local Health Protection Team's (HPT) will advise on whether named visitors can be facilitated.

Additionally, we know how important the festive period can be to staff, residents and their friends and family and we want all individuals living in care homes to have the opportunity to celebrate the festive period in a way that is meaningful to them.

As discussed throughout this letter, we currently consider symptom awareness, testing, correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and face coverings (as appropriate), hand hygiene, increased ventilation and the IPC measures as detailed in the winter respiratory guidance to be effective at minimising the risk of Covid transmission. This means that gifts, do not need to be wiped down or isolated, decorations can be hung and residents can spend quality time with family and friends, during the festive period, as long as excellent hand hygiene practice is followed. The exception to this is where there is an outbreak in the home, limitations on visiting will apply as per local HPT's considerations based on the Public Health Scotland's adult care home settings [guidance](#). Please also note Public Health Scotland's guidance regarding visits from community groups, which are still not advised to attend inside the premises.

### **What we will continue to do to support you through the winter period**

We will continue to support you by working with our partners in Public Health Scotland, ARHAI and the Care Inspectorate, to keep you informed and update guidance in line with evidence and science, with involvement of sector representatives.

Throughout the winter period we will also continue to support you through sustainability payments resources through the [wellbeing hub](#) and access to PPE, when you and your colleagues need it.

We would like once again to thank you and your staff for your continued efforts to follow and promote these measures



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