

off. But they said given they've provided money via the Infection Control Fund for employers to use if staff need to self-isolate and pay staff to come in and get tested, so therefore it shouldn't be a problem. They were keen to get information on why care workers are not being tested because they are operating with the view that because they've made some top level decisions that all employers should consequently be complying with them. I flagged up that we are speaking to members about this issue and we'll provide feedback.

I also asked if there was any cross referencing being done between the numbers of positive tests that are recorded via the weekly testing programme and subsequent allocations of the Infection Control Fund to care workers who need to self-isolate? For instance, if they record that 800 care workers tested positive between the 1st and 8th of October can they then check that those 800 care workers had their salary paid in full via the Infection Control fund? DHSC said they have updated the conditions to the Infection Control Fund to ensure that employers pay staff in full when they need to self-isolate. The Infection Control Fund currently doesn't ask specific questions though which would allow them to know if this is happening (although they are looking at updating the capacity tracker questions). DHSC said they can't nationally chase up staff who have tested positive to check if they've been paid to self-isolate and that this is something local councils would need to do. The ADASS representative said that a condition for employers to receive Infection Control Fund money was to ask if they'll be paying staff in full if they need to self-isolate etc. However, there are no means of checking that this happens. So again, there is the assumption from DHSC that they've introduced this new top-level measure and therefore employers will all act honourably.

To reinforce DHSC's lack of understanding of the sector the ADASS representative reported that some homes in his area have refused to sign up to the Infection Control Fund because they are worried it'll mean they have to accept the principle of paying staff in full for all future forms of sickness that lead to staff absences (not just COVID related) rather than just paying them statutory sick pay. There are providers who are worried that it'll set a worrying precedent for them and are concerned that the Infection Control Fund will only last until March.

Policy update

The national rollout for weekly testing in extra care and supported living establishments has started this week.

Work is ongoing to try and work out how to best test frequent care home visitors (friends and relatives of residents) following the announcement earlier this week.

Cohort pooling/group testing. A small pilot has been carried out into seeing whether group testing of care home workers and residents would be viable for the sector in order to help free up lab capacity (they believe it could free up 20k tests a day). The pilot involved groups of 5 residents being tested together and two staff being tested together (their tests are combined and put into one vial rather than being processed individually). They had 339 individuals tested in 138 rounds rather than 339 rounds. They acknowledge though that many challenges remain, namely, how to do the follow up work if any of the group testing delivers a positive result to identify who needs to be isolated. Given the wider problems with turnaround time it seems unlikely that they could roll out this approach for a while, but they are going to carry out further pilot work.

Visiting professionals. As reported previously they have run a pilot in Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough where professionals who visit care homes more than twice a week and come within a metre of residents (e.g. GPs, occupational therapists) would be tested each week. During the pilot many of the visiting professionals were unable to access the tests because of the wider demands for testing kits so they have not been in a position to assess the pilot. Therefore, DHSC are trying to resolve this by sending bulk testing kits through to their employers from this Monday and will extend the pilot. They hope to be able to start to analyse the results in the coming weeks and then roll it out further in areas of high prevalence. One provider representative expressed her exasperation at the lack of progress on this front. Care homes are being told by DHSC to restrict staff movement as a priority and so couldn't

understand the lack of prioritisation given to develop the testing of visiting professionals given we are now in the second wave and they'll be administering personal care to residents in multiple settings.

AOB.

I asked how and whether the Adult Social Care Taskforce recommendations on testing would be taken forward and was told that the "taskforce recommendations will be included in the review of the testing strategy but mostly was based on using evidence to support any further testing". I'm not entirely sure of what this means...

Cheers,

Name Redacted

From: Name Redacted

Sent: 18 August 2020 15:05

To:

(H.

<A.

<j.r

Name Redacted

Subject: DHSC testing meeting

Hi again,

Here are some notes from this afternoon's testing meeting in which we shared our latest survey data on the problems with testing and pay for staff who need to self-isolate.

Radox testing

DHSC issued a recall for all the Radox testing kits 10 days ago. They said they are on track to replace them all and to ensure that the whole care home sector is able to be provided with the level of kits needed to begin weekly testing. They reported that there has been an increase in symptomatic testing which is putting a strain on the system and they have still not been able to make effective use of the spare testing capacity at weekends. The Association of Directors of Public Health representative flagged that there have been increasing delays in care homes getting their test results through. DHSC said that the turnaround period for tests has suffered in the last 2 weeks because they have been focusing on increasing the volume of tests that are available.

Sector engagement/Care worker problems

I had an agenda item where I shared our latest survey results that featured on Newsnight a few weeks ago; that sizeable numbers of care workers still haven't been tested once for COVID (including 18% of all care home workers), that care home workers are still not being regularly tested (e.g. 46% of care home workers who have been tested have only been tested once) and that the majority of employers were not paying staff who needed to self-isolate their full wages (only 25% of care home employers). Our survey highlighted that some employers are still not engaging with the testing regime which is clearly very dangerous for both staff and residents. It is also an interlinked problem that sizeable numbers of care workers who test positive are not being paid in full despite the Infection Prevention Fund because it puts more pressure on these workers to keep working and also discourages others from wanting to engage with the testing regime for fear of what will happen to them if they test positive. Given they are anticipating a second wave in autumn and winter the need to sort out these issues is becoming increasingly important and I asked what steps DHSC are going to take.

The director of adult social care at Leicester Council stated that in 6 of the 103 care homes in the city, care staff are refusing to be tested. He also reported that whilst all these homes are subject to weekly tests (because they are in a