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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Health Board Chief Executives

cc. Health Board Medical Directors & Nurse Directors
Health Board Directors of Public Health

10 February 2020

Dear Colleague,

Health board responsibilities for assessment and testing service to individuals requiring management of possible coronavirus infection (2019-nCoV)

The evolving 2019-nCoV outbreak, the increasing number of countries reporting cases and the change to the geographical element of the case definition have led to a significant increase in individuals requiring assessment and testing.

The aim is to manage as many people as possible outside the hospital/Emergency Department/minor illness/injury assessment services. NHS 111 is already running an enhanced service to manage calls and this enhanced service is fully integrated with NHS Direct Wales and Public Health Wales.

Public Health Wales has provided an outstanding response to assessment and testing in the community while numbers have been low but the present and predicted need greatly exceeds its capacity and we now need health boards to urgently establish local arrangements.

To ensure a timely response to requests for assessment and testing for 2019-nCoV it is essential that every health board develops community assessment and testing plans, which avoid further overloading of our ambulance service and a surge in Emergency Departments attendances due to 2019-nCoV.

In addition to this, each health board must have “Coronavirus Testing Units” separate from Emergency Departments for any members of the public who may arrive on site concerned that they have symptoms consistent with coronavirus. These plans should be operational as soon as practically possible and by no later than Friday 14 February.

Community assessment and testing

Health boards will need to adhere to the following principals when undertaking community testing for 2019-nCoV:

- The service will be provided to individuals who have been assessed by PHW to be well enough not to require admission to hospital.
- The individual to be assessed (or their responsible person) has the capacity to understand instructions regarding self-isolation and has living arrangements suitable to undertake it.
- The individual to be assessed (or their responsible person) understands the action to take should health deteriorate while waiting assessment.
- The service will be available from 08.00 to 20.00 seven days a week.



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- Transport for staff delivering community assessment and sampling will be provided by the health board.
- A minimum of 2 staff will be available during these hours to deliver community assessment and testing. One should be suitably trained for clinical assessment.
- Staff will be trained in the use of PPE required for coronavirus contact, including donning and doffing, fit-tested for FFP3 masks.
- Staff will be trained in sampling requirements, sample packaging requirements and waste management.
- Staff will comply with guidance produced by PHW: [Guidance for clinicians collecting, transporting and waste management of a HCID respiratory virus 2019-nCoV specimens\(s\) in the community.](#)
- To facilitate communication between the health board, the ambulance service and PHW and to ensure prompt response to requests for community assessment and testing an operational lead within health boards will be available from 08.00 to 20.00 seven days a week.

“Coronavirus Testing Units”

As an alternative to community testing for patients who are suitable for home self-isolation and are able to securely self-transport to hospital sites, health boards need to establish Coronavirus Testing Units at their hospitals. This will mean that people who fulfil the criteria as ‘possible’ cases of 2019-nCoV can be tested, while other patients continue to receive appropriate care.

Patients will be assessed for suitability for CTU testing according to their self-reported clinical state and ability to safely travel to and from the CTU. This assessment will be completed by Public Health Wales Health Protection Teams. Guidance on the specification and procedures for CTUs will be circulated by Public Health Wales in the next 48 hours.

Efforts are currently concentrated on identifying possible cases. Going forward the CTUs will be crucial for testing should we experience limited person to person spread in the community.

I realise that this is a difficult ask of health boards given the present pressures that our healthcare system is already facing but I know that you will understand the need to develop a proportionate response which avoids destabilisation of our ambulance services and large numbers of patients attending Emergency Departments. Further advice is available from PHW

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To assist with our planning in response to this enhanced public health incident, a Health and Social Services Planning Group is being established within Welsh Government. A representative from each health board is required and nominees should be sent to ECCW.Health@gov.wales by no later than Friday 14 February.

Thank you for your support in taking this forward.

Personal Data

DR FRANK ATHERTON