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Twice-weekly Covid tests for Welsh NHS staff played down by official

🕒 11 November 2021

Coronavirus



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A senior Welsh health official has said he does not think twice-weekly lateral flow testing of NHS staff is "particularly important in the whole scheme of

things".

Chris Jones spoke after it emerged some hospitals had not introduced the tests, announced last December, until March.

The deputy chief medical officer said they were a "small part" of a "huge range" of infection control measures.

The comments angered a group seeking a Wales-only public inquiry.

Following the interview, a Welsh government spokesman said routinely testing asymptomatic frontline staff "is important but it is just one of many measures".

Dr Chris Jones described the tests as "an additional opportunity for staff if they wish to reassure themselves".

Asked if he was saying it was ok for infected staff to work in hospitals, he told the **BBC Wales Live programme**: "No, no. Symptomatic staff have to remain away from the workplace and then there are a whole host of measures to protect patients in hospitals.

"Infection prevention control guidance has changed hugely.

"Cleaning techniques, the use of PPE (personal protective equipment), the social distancing in hospitals, the one-way systems, the ventilation changes that have been made - these are extensive changes which have been implemented to try to protect people from infection in hospitals."

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In response the Covid-19 Bereaved Families Justice Cymru group said the comments "left us floored". On Twitter the group said it was "speechless and angry".

The group's calls for a Wales-only public inquiry were **joined by Labour MP Chris Evans** on Wednesday evening.

He said: "This is about bereaved families who have lost loved ones and have questions that need to be answered."



Chris Jones is Wales deputy chief medical officer

In response the Welsh Conservative health spokesman Russell George said: "If testing NHS staff is not a priority or deemed important for ministers, then how on earth are we ever going to tackle hospital acquired infections that are raging out of control in Welsh hospitals and seeing people die unnecessarily?"

The British Medical Association's Welsh consultants committee chair Dr Phil Banfield, who has criticised the length of time it took to introduce routine testing, said it still "seems to lack any systematic approach to it in many places".

Earlier, when asked about the delays introducing the tests in some hospitals, the Health Minister Eluned Morgan told Radio Wales Drive that it was "difficult to switch these things on overnight" with around 90,000 staff in the Welsh NHS.

"You need to make sure you've planned for it, you need to make sure test kits are circulated, you need to make sure you have people trained up and that the whole organisation is on the same page.

"You need to understand there are teams across the NHS that are dispersed across the country, that there are district teams and community teams.

"All those things are things that take a while to put in place and that's why perhaps it took slightly longer than we would have liked to have seen in terms of making sure that testing was introduced at the earliest opportunity."

'One of many measures'

A Welsh government spokesman said: "Every day, thousands of people - staff, patients and visitors - enter our busy hospitals. These are all opportunities for the virus to also enter.

"Testing everyone who is admitted to hospital for care and treatment and routinely testing asymptomatic frontline staff is important but it is just one of many measures, which the NHS is taking to prevent infections, such as the use of appropriate PPE, hand hygiene, social distancing, bed spacing, deep-cleaning, one-way systems, streaming of positive and negative patients and additional ventilation."

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