

Registered Providers
HSC Trust Chief Executives

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT4 3SQ

Tel: **I&S**

Email: sean.holland@health-ni.gov.uk

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Dear Colleagues

COVID-19: PPE AND TESTING

I am writing to update you on two issues which I know have been of concern in the sector: personal protective equipment (PPE) and access to testing.

I attach the latest update from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer to the health and care service on PPE, which issued on Saturday 28th March. I want to repeat the gratitude that is expressed in the correspondence for the incredible effort and hard work from all health and social care colleagues in responding to COVID-19 to date. Protecting frontline staff across the health and social care system is a priority and we want to ensure there is confidence in the recommended approach to PPE. The update does not change the position set out our guidance on domiciliary care and on care homes, both published on 17th March, but does note that the current guidance on PPE is being further reviewed with the aim of making it clearer to frontline staff. All staff will want to read the update from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Nursing Officer.

Testing for COVID-19 is guided by an Interim Protocol for Testing which applies across the region, this protocol is subject to ongoing review and the most recent version of the Interim Protocol was issued for implementation on Saturday 28th March. Testing is now more widely available for frontline staff, including for frontline care staff working in the community. This will include key staff working in nursing and residential homes and delivering domiciliary care. Despite an increase in our testing capacity, there are continuing constraints and there is likely to be very significant demand for this service across health and social care. I would ask you all to ensure testing is used only when it will have a genuine impact our ability to deliver frontline care. It is important though that staff who are symptomatic and who have not been tested are not in the work place or delivering care, in order to protect patients and clients.

Health and care workers in critical frontline roles should contact their GPs to arrange for a test, if this will help them return to work more quickly. However, using a negative result to allow someone to return to work is not completely without risk and will need to be carefully considered. I attached the updated Interim Protocol for Testing which provides more detail.

Support continues to be available to you, including through the RQIA's Service Support Team. You will all have received separate correspondence on how to access support from that team.

This remains a rapidly moving situation. I will continue to provide further updates to you as necessary.

Thank you again for the work that you are doing.

Yours sincerely

Personal Data

SEAN HOLLAND

Chief Social Work Officer/Deputy Secretary

cc: Michael McBride, DoH
Charlotte, McArdle, DoH
Marie Roulston, HSCB
Name Redacted HSCB
Dermot Parsons, RQIA
Rodney Morton, PHA
Vivian McConvey, PCC
Pauline Shepherd, IHCP
Leslie-Anne Newton, ARC