



Minister announces support measures for care homes

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Health Minister Robin Swann has announced £6.5m in additional funding for Northern Ireland's care homes, as part of a series of measures to support the sector during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Minister also confirmed a further expansion of testing and the publication of updated guidance for care homes, aimed at strengthening infection prevention and control and protecting residents.



The guidance provides advice on areas such as the use of PPE, testing for staff and residents, staff redeployment and caring for residents in a care home setting. Importantly, the guidance sets out a new approach to managing discharges from hospital.

Minister Swann said: **"Our nursing and residential care homes are at the forefront of the battle against COVID-19. I want to pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of staff working across the care sector at this very challenging time. It is vital that we continue to support care homes and their staff to keep themselves, and the vulnerable people they care for, safe and well."**

“The revised guidance published today provides up to date advice on how to do that. Ensuring that care homes have sufficient supplies of PPE is an absolute priority, and Trusts will work with care homes in their areas to ensure that each home has a buffer of PPE stock.

“I am also taking steps to ensure that homes can continue to operate at this difficult time. Health and Social Care Trusts will continue to work in partnership with care home providers to help deal with staff shortages. Where people have responded to our Workforce Appeal, those with the right skills will be prioritised for deployment with independent care home providers. Trust staff have already been redeployed to care homes and will continue to be.

“Essential to this is the provision of nursing care and I want to in particular encourage registered nurses who have transferable skills, expert knowledge and experience of caring for older people in a range of other settings to come forward and play their part in keeping vulnerable people out of hospital and in their own home.”

Testing will now be carried out on all staff and all residents in care homes when a home is identified to the Health Protection team in PHA as having a potential outbreak or cluster of infections. The previous approach was to test staff and residents displaying symptoms.

All patients being discharged from acute hospital care to a care home are to be tested 48 hours prior to discharge. In addition, all patients/residents being transferred into a care home from any setting, whether that be from hospital, supported living or directly from their own home, will be tested 48 hours prior to admission to the care home. This will help care home staff to understand each resident’s status and to plan their care effectively.

The updated guidance makes clear that all patients discharged from hospitals into care homes – whether they have tested negative or not – should be subject to isolation for 14 days.

In addition, all care homes are asked to make sure they check residents and staff twice a day for symptoms of coronavirus. Symptoms in care home residents can be atypical so increased vigilance is critical.

The additional funding announced today will help ensure homes can increase the level of cleaning undertaken and bring in any additional staff they need to help support the isolation of residents when this is necessary.

Under the support package, homes will receive a payment of £10k, £15k or £20k depending on their size.

The Minister has also announced the piloting of a new model for care homes: 'Safe at Home'. This will see the Department working closely with a small number of homes to test an enhanced approach to care delivery and to help us learn lessons that we can roll out more widely. Building on initiatives already taking place in the sector, the approach will include supporting staff to live in the care home – helping to reduce the chances of coronavirus being carried into the home.

Notes to editors:

1. The [updated guidance](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-nursing-and-residential-care-homes-northern-ireland) (<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-guidance-nursing-and-residential-care-homes-northern-ireland>) is available on DoH website.
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