

To:

Health Board Chief Executives

Local Authority Chief Executives

CC:

NHS Directors of Planning

NHS Directors of Public Health

Local Authority Directors of Public Protection

Trust Chief Executives

PHW Executive Director of Public Health Services/Medical Director

PHW Deputy Director of Public Health Services

Regional Tier TTP

LRF Chairs

LRF Co-ordinators



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

27 July 2020

**Prevention and response to Covid-19 in Wales – Lessons learned and request to develop Local Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plans**

Dear Colleagues,

The Covid-19 response has placed our services under enormous strain and demanded unprecedented collaborative action. We would like to formally thank you and your teams for their considerable efforts to date which have helped effectively and successfully to manage the Covid-19 response in Wales. Recently this has focused on dealing with clusters, incidents and local outbreaks, with the support of Public Health Wales. There has been some early learning from these and initial lessons are summarised at **Annex 1**.

However, as further easements to social restrictions take place and life in Wales moves closer to normality, there is risk that areas of Wales which currently have low rates of community transmission may see a resurgence in cases. It is important that all Health Boards and Local Authorities have effective local arrangements for surveillance in order to recognise potential risks in their communities or other settings and to ensure continued prevention, planning and mitigating actions are in place. These measures are likely to involve more than one organisation and more than one sector so close working with Local Resilience Fora is essential.

In the first instance, localised enclosed setting or community transmission of Covid-19 should be managed in line with the **Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales 2020**. It is likely that we will experience incidents and outbreaks that will spread beyond the local and to deal with this we are developing a National Covid-19 Public Health Escalation and Response Plan. This will be shared with you as soon as possible for comment and it will describe the process for escalation of incidents, outbreaks and local flare ups, outline the structures and triggers for significant incidents, outbreaks and describe potential extended control measures.

## Development of Local Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plans

We know at local level a lot of work is being undertaken and we are now asking that you formalise your planning and response arrangements in '**Local Covid-19 Prevention and Response' Plans**. Chief Executives of the Health Board have the responsibility for the health of all individuals in their respective Health Board areas we are asking them to lead this work through Directors of Planning, supported by Directors of Public Health and in partnership with local authority Chief Executives and their Directors of Public Protection. Health Boards will need to work with all partner agencies locally and with PHW nationally to develop these plans in order to continue to keep the public safe.

Local authorities have been central to the management of our Covid-19 response. As community leaders, providers of a wide range of public services and various regulatory and enforcement activities, their role in containment is critical as we have seen in the outbreaks so far. In a scenario where an outbreak becomes more significant, then the role and contribution of an authority will also grow. It is therefore essential that the Plans are prepared on a fully collaborative basis, and are agreed and signed off by both each Health Boards and the partner local authorities.

When developing Local Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plans you will need to consider both the prevention of and response to Covid-19 in a variety of settings including for examples health and social care services; care homes; high-risk workplaces, educational settings and in the community. Integrated planning and communications will therefore will necessary. These plans are an important element of our winter planning for the health and care system.

These plans will need to be by complemented and informed by the local arrangements for sampling and testing. In addition to this therefore and as set out in the Welsh Government 'Testing Strategy', you will need to consider and identify the methods for local sampling and testing to ensure a rapid response that is accessible to your entire population and takes into consideration the unique characteristics of the communities in your area.

The success of our Test Trace and Protect (TTP) Programme is central to reducing transmission of Covid-19 as it provides an understanding of who is affected, and why/where Covid-19 infections are occurring. A TTP Operating Framework will be re-issued shortly. It is expected that in each Health Board area an adequately resourced Multi-agency Strategic Regional TTP Oversight Group will provide situational awareness on emerging clusters and outbreaks and give a picture of your local epidemiological situation (including incidents involving hospitals and healthcare facilities) to key partners and to the Welsh Government (Covid-19 Intelligence Cell). Your plans will need to reflect these structures and the reporting arrangements, and include how community and hospital contact tracing arrangements are integrated across the TTP programme.

To ensure that you are sighted on all risks in your area we ask that you consider the Wales Covid-19 Risk Assessment undertaken by our military liaison colleagues. Please liaise with the LRF Coordinator for you area to obtain these.

We are acutely aware of the pressures you are under. However there is an urgency to the development of Local Covid-19 Prevention and Response Plans. Public Health Wales is currently developing guidance to assist you and this will be with you by 29<sup>th</sup> July.

We ask that initial plans are developed at pace and submitted to Public Health Wales for their comment by Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August. Plans should be e-mailed to: [PHW.SCSupportGroup@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:PHW.SCSupportGroup@wales.nhs.uk) . We recognise that the plans will need to be iterative, adapting to reflect local planning discussions and will be refined as multi-agency scenario planning takes place through the Summer months and local and national approaches develop.

Collectively, public service partners have worked together to deliver a tremendous response to Covid-19. The summer offers an opportunity for us to prepare to manage the next stages of the disease. It is clear that any organisation working on its own will not be able deal with the range of consequences but together, and with proper planning, we can continue to protect the people of Wales. We offer our thanks again for your continued efforts to help effectively and successfully manage the Covid-19 response in Wales.

Yours sincerely

PD

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## Responding to Outbreaks and Incidents – early learning

- The Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales remains the appropriate plan to be used for Covid-19 incidents and outbreaks.
- The Communicable Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales forms part of the Civil Contingency response structure and planning in Wales. Learning from the North Wales Outbreaks the revised plan (published on 13 July 2020) now contains a specific section (Part 7) that sets out the relationship of an OCT to Local Resilience Fora (Strategic Coordination Groups and Recovery Coordinating Groups).
- Once an incident or outbreak has been declared the OCT must be seen as the strategic partnership mechanism through which all decisions on declarations of incident/outbreak and 'control actions' and communications are agreed. Communications from an OCT must be collaborative and agreed by the OCT Chair; separate communications outside of this process can give rise to confusion and potential release of incorrect data or incorrectly interpreted information.
- Local Authorities may wish to send/have co-opted other strategic officers including communications' leads as members of the OCT.
- Regular surveillance of background community infection rates in which incidents in closed/occupational settings arise are important to determine whether there are more widespread community implications in terms of causation or transmission.
- OCT Chairs may involve PHW laboratory genomic experts in analysis to determine timescales of infection where there may be doubt

Views were sought from members of the 2 current North Wales OCTs and the IMT for Kepak, Merthyr on where there was further room for improvements. The main observations and recommendations are set out below:

- Early notification to the LRF Coordinator of a Covid-19 incident or outbreak will assist with determining additional necessary membership of an OCT or IMT and also help further improve communications.
- An OCT or IMT should provide a multi-agency Situation Report (SitRep) update following each Covid-19 OCT or IMT meeting.
- The role and membership of the OCT is detailed in the Communicable Disease Outbreak Control Plan for Wales. All organisations should familiarise themselves with this plan.
- Clear and timely multi-lingual guidance to the public is a cornerstone of effective outbreak control measures.
- Engagement with partner agencies, employers, trade unions and communities is essential to explain the role and actions of the OCT and IMT.
- Accurate data gathering during mass sampling and testing, and use of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to consolidate, interpret and share outbreak information is key to an effective response to Covid-19 outbreaks and clusters.