

Message

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Sent: 30/11/2020 8:59:23 PM
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Subject: DHSC Testing meeting

Good evening,

There was another testing meeting today and for once DHSC actually answered the questions we raised rather than just defer them to a future meeting.

Before the meeting we'd asked "What steps will be taken by DHSC to ensure that care staff who need to self-isolate will be paid in full given we know that there are still employers refusing to do the right thing?" and supplied them with a list of employers who weren't paying staff properly. At the start of the meeting to provide some context I read out an email from a member who had contacted the social care inbox recently saying there had been a new outbreak in her home and she was worried about the prospect of only getting statutory sick pay. When the last outbreak happened staff were only paid statutory sick pay which would only be enough to cover her rent. She also said she has 3 children to support.

In answer to the question above DHSC said they had discussed the issue with the Care Minister earlier in the day and that it is one she is interested in. She wants to see full compliance because of the infection control aspects and also because it's the right thing to do for care workers. DHSC said they have recently changed the questions asked by the capacity tracker and it is allowing them to build up a more accurate picture of what is happening in the sector. For instance, a previous iteration of the question had some employers responding by saying they weren't paying staff to self-isolate because they had no staff who had tested positive or who had any symptoms which skewed the figures. So they are asking more specific questions now and the new data is telling them that 80% of employers are paying staff in full to self-isolate (we will be given a run through of the specific questions they are asking at the next meeting). In terms of what they are doing about this non-compliance, they are setting up some "regional assurance teams" this week who will follow up with the employers who aren't paying staff properly to provide them with more "additional support". They are also going to do some more as yet unspecified work with CQC on the issue and consider doing some additional communication across the sector because they believe some providers may still not be still aware that they need to pay staff in full... So they are continuing with their soft approach but at least after much prompting they are finally generating some helpful data which at least allows them to identify some of the employers that aren't paying staff properly.

A few employer bodies spoke up on this issue and expressed concerns that the ICF wasn't sufficient for them to be able to pay for all the infection control measures intended.

Testing Update

The average turnaround time for processing care home tests and delivering a result has now dropped to 43 hours. 59% care home workers now get their results back within 24-48 hours (compared to 10% of care home workers a few months ago). This is due to a major increase in lab capacity but they warned the turnaround time might drop again as the government looks set to roll out mass testing across the wider population.

Homecare workers were offered weekly testing last week with 45-50% of employers signing up for tests within the first week.

The ADASS rep (the ASC director in Leicester City Council) highlighted some other changes to the capacity tracker which now allowed councils to see what ratio of care home workers in their area had been tested each week. In his area the data said that 69% of eligible care home workers had received a test (although his department rang around all their local

homes to doublecheck the figures and he noticed that some providers were making data inputting errors which may be skewing the figures somewhat, so he asked DHSC to warn providers about this).

I then asked what the national ratio was of staff being tested every week. DHSC believe that 70% of eligible care home staff are being tested each week. They did caveat this by saying that due to staff leave and the fact that following a positive test care home workers do not get tested for 90 days, that they believed that around only 85% of care home workers could be tested in any one week (they are going to do further analysis on this calculation). So their data seems fairly consistent with what our recent survey reported on the topic. After many months of us raising the issue they are at least finally capturing data that at least allows them to see what employers are not testing staff properly even though they are then not really doing anything with that information.

Policy update

Visitor testing – rollout of the lateral flow testing kits has begun. Shipments have been sent to the 385 largest care homes along with a DHSC device that has a pre-programmed app for them to upload the results. Other providers will just be sent the testing kits with some guidance on how they can upload their results because they said they couldn't send out 15,000 devices with the app on to these other homes (even though it was raised later in the meeting that DHSC are in fact about to distribute 11,000 tablets to care homes across the country...). Questions were asked about when the lateral flow testing kits should be used on staff. For instance, if staff get their PCR tests on Monday but the results don't come back for a few days, when is the more opportune time to use the lateral flow tests? DHSC said guidance will be provided by SAGE's social care sub group at the end of the week. Concerns were also raised about the accuracy of the lateral flow testing kits and that they could give staff and visitors a false sense of security. Public Health England said the lateral flow testing is influenced by the skill of the operator with ranges quoted from 57% accuracy for a skilled lay operator to over 90% for a trained healthcare worker. There is an expectation that they will on average be around 75% accurate in care home settings. PHE therefore stressed the need for them not be considered a silver bullet but to be used alongside PPE, good ventilation and other infection control measures.

There was also concern raised that given the rollout of the lateral flow testing kits has begun that homes will be under pressure from friends and relatives of residents to roll them out asap when they might not be ready. For instance, one provider body said they still do not know if homes are going to be able to have even resources to carry out all the extra testing that they will be required to do. DHSC said they will be analysing the data from the pilot homes to ascertain how much additional pressure all this new testing is placing upon homes.

Visiting professionals – CQC adult social care inspectors will very shortly be getting weekly PCR tests which is good news for our members there. DHSC are looking at how soon they can rollout weekly testing to other regular care home visitors such as hairdressers and other NHS staff.

Cheers,

Name Redacted

National Officer

Local Government, Police and Justice team

UNISON

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Irrelevant & Sensitive