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# Coronavirus (COVID-19) update: Health Secretary's statement 21 April 2020

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Statement given by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport Jeane Freeman to the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday 21 April 2020.

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Presiding Officer,

It is no exaggeration to say that the effort and sacrifice of the people of Scotland in complying with the restrictions that are in place has helped save thousands of lives. I know that this has not been easy, but I cannot stress enough how much it matters and how much it is appreciated.

We want to be clear with the public on what the future might look like - and the principles that will shape any future decisions on easing any of the restrictions currently in place.

Later this week we will set out these principles that will guide us, the evidence we will use, the framework for our decision making. But this will not – yet – be a hard and fast plan with dates because it's simply too early to be able to set out that level of detail.

So again I thank the people of Scotland for their compliance with the rules, their patience and support.

Our aims now, and as we look to shape the next steps we need to take to find different ways to live with this virus, are to minimise its impact, continue to protect our NHS and social care services and to protect lives.

As at 9 o'clock this morning, there have been 8,672 positive cases confirmed - an increase of 222 from the numbers reported

A total of 1866 patients are in hospital with Covid-19 - that is an increase of 57 from yesterday.

A total of 166 people last night were in intensive care with confirmed or suspected Covid 19. That is a decrease of three since yesterday.

However, in the last 24 hours, I am afraid that 70 deaths have been registered of patients who have been confirmed as having Covid-19 – that takes the total number of deaths in Scotland, under that measurement, to 985.

I extend my sincere condolences to those who have lost loved ones.

The work our health service has undertaken to treble ICU capacity and increase bed availability has ensured that we have so far kept the number of cases below our capacity to cope.

To ensure that capacity is there we completed the construction of the NHS Louise Jordan in Glasgow over the weekend.

In just over three weeks, we have planned, developed and constructed a hospital that now stands ready for patients.

We continue to hope that this temporary facility will not be needed, but its creation gives us greater certainty that our NHS will have the capacity it needs in all circumstances.

The effort initially from the army and then from the frontline NHS staff, construction and support staff, and SECC staff has been awe inspiring and I'm sure everyone in the chamber shares my gratitude for their remarkable achievement.

This virus is a particular and serious threat to the most vulnerable in our society. Amongst those are our oldest citizens and those with underlying conditions.

That means protecting the residents of care homes is vital – just as it is during flu season and when they experience outbreaks of norovirus.

Guidance on isolation in care homes has been established for some time, requiring clear social distancing, active infection prevention and control and an end to communal activity.

But to provide clarity I am today setting out a tailored series of additional steps we are taking to support staff and residents.

I have required NHS Directors of Public Health to take enhanced clinical leadership for care homes. This will, for the first time, see these NHS directors reporting on their initial assessment of how each home is faring in terms of infection control, staffing, training, social distancing and testing and the actions they are taking to rectify – and rectify quickly – any deficits they identify.

To supplement this new clinical oversight we are establishing a national rapid action group - comprising the key partners with operational responsibility in this area. Recognising that Care Homes are primarily operated by independent providers.

This group will receive daily updates and activate any local action needed to deal with issues as they emerge, as well as co-ordinate our wider package of support to the sector.

In addition, we're equipping the Care Inspectorate for an enhanced role of assurance across the country, including greater powers to require reporting.

Testing for staff and residents is being expanded, including all symptomatic residents of care homes.

Covid-19 patients discharged from hospital to a care home should have given two negative tests before discharge. I now expect other new admissions to care homes to be tested and isolated for 14 days in addition to the clear social distancing measures the guidance sets out.

Testing is not an alternative to following the guidelines on social distancing, but it can and does provide assurance to family of those already in care homes, those being admitted to homes, as well as staff.

We are working to get students and social care retirees and returners into the system as quickly as possible, and we are supporting care homes to recruit additional staff. Employers now have direct access to the SSSC recruitment portal enabling quick and effective redeployment of care workers. Over 80 staff have already been matched for work in care homes or care at home under the new portal and more will be joining them in the coming weeks.

I have spoken to a number of stakeholders in recent days and thank them for their support. In particular I am pleased that Scottish Care who represent the majority of care homes in Scotland agree that this strategy and approach is the right one.

We owe enormous gratitude to workers safeguarding our most vulnerable loved ones in care homes and at home.

To ensure staff have the PPE they need we're increasing access to NHS PPE to care homes. Whilst care homes have their own PPE supply route as before we have undertaken to supplement that, recognising the additional demand on them at this time. There have been over 16 million items distributed to social care since we launched a triage helpline for that sector on 19 March.

And this week we've also begun delivery of a week's supply of aprons, gloves and fluid-resistant surgical masks direct to every single care homes, prioritising those with known outbreaks and completing all of that by the end of this week.

The demand for PPE is a huge global challenge, but we are doing all we can to ensure continued supply and distribution.

On top of the supply of NHS PPE to care homes, we have delivered over 80 million items to Scottish hospitals and provided eight weeks' supply to GPs and Primary Care in Scotland.

Global demand as a result of this pandemic is huge and we continue to run our 24/7 operation to procure the supplies we need for Scotland. In addition, we also work on a four-nation basis with our colleagues across the rest of the UK

We are also continuously updating our guidance in line with the science as our understanding develops so that workers have clarity on the type of PPE they should wear and in which setting or scenario.

I should be clear that the guidance from Public Health England which they issued last week on actions to undertake in the event of shortages did not apply to Scotland – we continue to have sufficient stocks of PPE but we also continue to work hard daily to ensure orders arrive on time.

If staff have concerns we want to hear about them, and they can contact us at [covid-19-health-PPE@gov.scot](mailto:covid-19-health-PPE@gov.scot)

Work has been also been continuing on increasing our NHS testing capacity and we are on track to meet our target of 3,500 by the end of this month.

By that time every Health Board will have local testing capacity, and we are working across academia and the independent sector to increase that further.

In addition to our own efforts to increase testing, we work on a four-nation basis to increase testing capacity in Scotland as part of the UK offer.

Increasing our PCR test capacity, and looking forward to emerging other forms of testing if they are validated, will be essential to plans for the future.

Our work now on testing matters for now, but we are also building the testing infrastructure we will need as we move to the next phase. Our capacity to test, trace and isolate will be critical to controlling the virus.

Presiding Officer, we are witnessing the most significant transformation of health and social care in a generation.

Tripling our ICU capacity, massively scaling up and extending our procurement service, creating a new hospital in three weeks; protecting hundreds of thousands of our most vulnerable; welcoming thousands of NHS and social care returners, student nurses, midwives, AHPs and medics to support our communities and our NHS.

All of this is testimony to the professionalism, the dedication and sheer hard work of those who work in and lead our NHS and social care. And to the people of Scotland, who have stuck by the rules, stayed at home, maintained social distance, sacrificed the contact with family and friends that means so much and the pleasures they otherwise enjoy.

That transformation and those sacrifices are impressive beyond words. But alongside that, our NHS remains open. From the GP services to A&E to urgent care – all are open and ready to care for those who need it. So to everyone – please do not hesitate to come forward if your condition or that of your child or your family member concerns you.

If you have symptoms, seek help by contacting your GP, calling NHS24, or by attending A&E for urgent symptoms. The NHS is coping with Covid, but it is also open for all other urgent health issues.

The NHS and our services continue to protect the people of Scotland and we continue to do all we can to support them.

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