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News

Testing expansion update

Published: **25 November 2020 16:49**Topic: [Health and social care](#), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Scotland](#)

New testing approach set out for health and social care sector and communities.

Health Secretary Jeane Freeman has announced plans for a significant expansion in testing for hospital patients, health and social care staff, and communities in Level 4 areas.

From next week, all emergency admissions will be tested for COVID, and twice-weekly lateral flow testing will be introduced for all patient-facing healthcare staff working in hospitals, COVID-19 Assessment Centres and the Scottish Ambulance Service. Testing will be introduced for all elective admissions to hospital from mid-December.

In the social care sector, testing will be expanded over the coming months for designated visitors, visiting professional staff, and care at home workers. Visitor testing will be initially introduced in up to 12 care homes across four local authority areas from 7 December, with full roll-out planned for January.

To facilitate Christmas visiting in all care homes, PCR testing will be provided for those that do not have access to lateral flow testing by that time, with guidance on visiting arrangements over Christmas to be published shortly. Testing for the other two social care groups will also commence in January.

December will also see the start of a testing programme for students before they return home for Christmas, and targeted geographic testing trialled in communities covered by NHS Ayrshire and Arran, Forth Valley, and Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which are currently under Level 4 restrictions.

This trial will utilise a mixture of existing and new testing technology, and will include an asymptomatic test site with capacity to test up to 12,000 people over the course of a week in Johnstone, Renfrewshire. The results of these pilots will inform plans for a wider programme of targeted community testing in early 2021.

From the return of the school term in January, a number of school pilots will also get underway with the aim of establishing a sustainable programme of asymptomatic testing amongst school staff.

Ms Freeman said:

“Our plans to deliver significantly expanded testing in Scotland will provide further protection for our communities, our extraordinary health and social care staff and the people they serve and are fully aligned with the clear advice from the senior clinical and scientific advisers who reviewed our Testing Strategy.

“This expansion is possible because of increases in our testing capacity, delivered through our new regional hub laboratories and supply of new testing technologies, which will help us suppress COVID to the lowest levels possible as we face a challenging winter ahead.

“Testing is just one layer of protection. While it is important it is only one of the tools we have to bring down the virus – reducing contacts, keeping our distance, wearing face coverings, enhanced infection prevention and control in our NHS and care settings, and vaccines when they come, work to greatest effect when they work together.”

Background

[COVID testing strategy: Health Secretary's statement Wednesday 25 November 2020](#)

[Guidance for students returning home](#)

[Clinical and scientific review of the Scottish Government testing strategy](#)

Remember FACTS for a safer Scotland:

F – Face coverings

A – Avoid crowded places

C – Clean your hands regularly

T – Two metres distance

S – Self isolate and book a test if you have symptoms

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