Department of Health & Social Care

From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care

39 Victoria Street
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I&S

07 May 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Further information on coronavirus testing in care homes

On 28 April the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care committed to offering a coronavirus test to every staff member and resident in every care home in England, whether symptomatic or not.

I am delighted that we are now in the position that we can routinely test around 100,000 of the highest priority population across the UK every day. But we must aim to do more and to prioritise that testing where appropriate. We have already started the process of testing every staff member and resident, and by reaching this new national capacity, we will soon be able to deliver up to 30,000 tests per day specifically for residents and staff in homes for older people. This will help providers better protect and treat their residents and workforce and support their workforce planning. It will also enable all of us to build up a strategic understanding of the prevalence of the virus in local areas and the sector.

This ambitious plan requires a close partnership with local leaders to help direct these efforts to where it is needed most.

I would like to pay tribute to the local and regional efforts over recent weeks to ensure that testing has been available to staff and residents, and for your patience while we have been working tirelessly to increase our national testing capacity. I want to stress how our ongoing national oversight and plans outlined below, are designed to enhance and support the hard work you are all doing to support those who need it.

Today, we are asking Local Directors of Public Health to lead work with Directors of Adult Social Services, local NHS providers, and PHE Regional Directors to ensure that testing of staff and residents in care settings is more joined up, and that available national capacity we are delivering is targeted to areas and care homes with the greatest need.

We recognise this is a significant change and we want to give you early notification. In the coming days, we are launching a digital portal for adult social care coronavirus testing, to make arranging tests for care homes as easy as possible for you and care homes themselves. We will also make digital and clinically approved guidance available via this portal.

It will only be accessed by those needing to order testing for care home staff and residents. We will be asking local authorities and care providers to support care homes as they receive the

results of those tests and support the prioritisation of testing through this route. For example, we want to work with local bodies to determine where we send the mobile testing units and to prioritise homes of need.

This should include:

- Identification of all eligible care homes in your area
- Referral of homes for testing via the portal (or supporting the care home referring themselves)
- Provision of local contacts and support information for each home

Following the processing of tests by our labs, test results for residents will be communicated to care home managers. We will also share this information to councils in order to help manage coronavirus outbreaks in local areas.

All further details required to participate in this will follow in due course. This letter reflects our very latest position and we will keep you updated as plans progress.

For clarity, when a care home identifies their first symptomatic resident and is concerned they may have an outbreak, they should continue to contact their Local Health Protection team who will undertake a risk assessment, provide public health advice, and arrange urgent testing of all symptomatic residents. All symptomatic care workers, including those that work in domiciliary care, can continue to be referred via the gov.uk portals to access tests, as can symptomatic recipients of domiciliary care over 65 years old.

We greatly appreciate your involvement in this programme.

Yours,

Personal Data

HELEN WHATELY