Dear Care Home Manager

We are carefully monitoring infection rates of Covid-19 in our care homes and we have been encouraged by the ongoing reduction in positivity rates for the whole of January. This is the result of the vigilance and hard work of everyone involved in running care homes and we thank you sincerely.

However we must remain vigilant and although we are making excellent progress in the roll out of the vaccination programme, testing remains a key part of our approach to preventing the transmission of the virus. We are also keenly focused on preventing the spread of new variants of the virus into our care homes.

We have carefully considered the latest scientific advice and following engagement with a number of stakeholders on 4 February the Minister and Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services announced the introduction of twice weekly testing for all care homes staff using LFD test kits as well and the potential for 10 day daily testing to be applied as part of an outbreak management programme in a care home <https://gov.wales/enhanced-covid-19-testing-introduced-care-homes>

Further detail in relation to this enhanced testing for care homes is contained within this communication.

We understand that this is an incredibly difficult time for care homes managing the range of testing, infection, prevention and control measures relating to Covid-19 as well as addressing the direct impacts it is having on residents, staff and business continuity. We do therefore recognise that adding additional testing requirements will be a challenge and as such Ministers have also announced a financial support package for care homes to assist with that burden - further information on this will follow separately.

However our priority continues to be to protect our most vulnerable citizens and we believe that this additional testing, whilst a challenge to implement, will bring real benefits in terms of helping to prevent transmission of the virus within care homes, and in particular will assist us in our preventative strategy in relation to new variants of the Covid-19 virus.

Feedback from the introduction of LFD testing for staff in care homes in England has been positive and, despite the initial challenges of building the additional testing into the weekly and daily programme for staff, care homes are reporting that they are identifying infectious staff much more quickly and that they feel reassured that they have a better chance of preventing ongoing transmission through this additional testing.

I sincerely hope you welcome the introduction of this additional safeguard for our care homes and ask that you continue to keep up the excellent work in supporting the testing and infection prevention and control interventions.

NHS Test and Trace Welsh Government

**LFD Testing in Care homes**

 **FAQs and guidance**

**Who can I use the testing for?**

***Visitors and visiting professionals***

You are already able to use LFD tests for testing visitors and visiting professionals to your care homes (unless visiting professionals are already part of a routine testing programme). ([Care Home LFD Testing of Visitors Guidance Roll out in Wales Dec 11-20 final amends v2-HR.pdf (govdelivery.com)](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/UKWALES_CSSIW_INT/2020/12/11/file_attachments/1623523/Care%20Home%20LFD%20Testing%20of%20Visitors%20Guidance%20Roll%20out%20in%20Wales%20Dec%2011-20%20final%20amends%20v2-HR.pdf)

**Please note that visiting professionals do not need to be tested every day or every time they enter a care home.** They will be tested twice a week. If they arrive at your care home with evidence that they are already part of a regular testing programme and have already completed an LFD test in the past 4 days (usually a letter from their employer or with a text message on their phone from the results portal) then you can allow them to enter the care home with usual infection prevention and control measures.

***Agency staff***

For **Agency staff** we have previously confirmed that where possible the movement of staff between separate settings should be restricted. Agency staff should also, where possible, be added to the routine testing programme of the setting in which they are working.

However LFD testing can also be used to test agency staff in those **ad hoc instances** where they have been needed to work at short notice and may have just missed the latest round of PCR testing. In these instances LFD testing can be used to support them commencing work but they should be added to the routine PCR and LFD testing schedules as soon as possible.

***Care home staff***

The introduction of LFD testing for care home staff is an additional safeguard for asymptomatic staff in addition to the current PCR testing. We are implementing this testing on the basis of ‘testing to safeguard’ vulnerable people by identifying positive cases that could transmit the virus and taking earlier action to prevent further transmission and infection.

**Who can’t I use the testing for?**

**LFD tests must not be used for any other purpose than asymptomatic testing for visitors, visiting professionals and staff in line with the programmes set out in this guidance.**

**You cannot use LFD test for residents.** There is no change to testing policy for residents. In Wales care homes residents do not undergo regular asymptomatic testing but are tested if they are symptomatic or as part of whole home testing programmes within an outbreak management plan.

**You cannot use LFD testing to release staff who should be isolating (**due to TTP advice or being a confirmed ‘contact’) to return to work.

**LFD testing cannot be used to confirm a PCR test**.A positive PCR test in alert levels 3 and 4 should be considered a true positive and appropriate action taken. That initial positive result can be confirmed, particularly where a false positive is suspected, by another PCR test as a part of the whole home testing that will be triggered.

**LFD tests must not be used to test symptomatic staff or residents.**

**LFD tests cannot be used for testing staff member’s family and friends**

The Welsh Government and Public Health Wales do not advise repeat testing for 90 days after a previously positive result, unless new COVID-19 symptoms develop (although this is currently under review). In some cases people have continued to test positive for many weeks after initially testing positive for the virus because small fragments of the virus can stay in the nose and throat for several weeks after infection. However these individuals are no longer infectious to others. Therefore repeat testing could lead to unnecessary time off work due to a further period of self-isolation.

**How does the LFD testing programme for staff work?**

* **Staff will complete one LFD test on the same day as their weekly PCR test on site at the care home**. Undertaking these two tests on site alongside the PCR test will help to provide some quality assurance checking.
* **Staff will also complete one LFD test midweek between PCR tests**. These tests can be completed at home so staff who are not working on the day of the mid-week LFD test do not need to come into work specifically for a test. Tests at home should be undertaken before a member of staff travels to resume their shift at the care home and ideally in good time to allow for cover arrangements to be made should they test positive. This will help reduce the burden of testing on care home capacity and help avoid further transmission of anyone who may test positive.
* **Ideally staff undertake an LFD test just before/at the beginning of their shift.**
* **If any staff test positive, they will need to undertake a confirmatory PCR and then self-isolate at home immediately until they receive their result**. Due to the critical state of care home staffing capacity confirmatory PCR tests are important as every single false positive leading to a member of staff needing to isolate unnecessarily creates additional risk to the safe operation of care homes.

In level four areas, care homes that have a positive case could be advised by health protection professionals to undertake daily LFD testing for all staff on duty for 10 days as part of an outbreak management process.

In addition to the asymptomatic testing programme care homes will continue to follow outbreak management processes and will notify their local Health Protection Team of any positive case.

**10-day testing in the event of an outbreak**

Based on local risk assessments Public Health Professionals may advise that a daily programme of testing for 10 days in your care home could be an effective intervention to help manage the outbreak and ideally bring it to a more rapid conclusion.

This would involve staff undertaking a test every day for 10 days and recording the results of each test and taking immediate action accordingly if they have a positive result.

Staff who are not working on any given day do not need to come in specifically to be tested, they can use test kits at home.

Care homes should continue to follow existing outbreak management processes as per normal and notify your local Health Protection Team of any positive case.

**Interpreting test results**

**A Negative result**

If you get a negative result, it is likely that you were not infectious at the time the test was taken. A negative test result, however, **is not a guarantee that you do not have coronavirus.**

If you test negative, you must continue to wear appropriate PPE, including a face mask, gloves and apron, and continue to follow IPC measures in line with your care home’s policy and in line with national policy including regular handwashing and social distancing. This is important because the test is not 100% sensitive.

**Void result**

No lines or one line next to T means the test is void. If you receive a void result, you should retake your test using another test kit.

**Positive result**

If you get a positive result, it means you are currently infected with coronavirus and risk infecting others. You must report this test result to the NHS, please see **page 12** of the accompanyingguidance on how to do this. When you report your result, you will be provided with further information on the next steps to take.

You must also report this test result immediately to your care home. In the case of a positive LFD result, you will need to complete a PCR test to confirm the positive result. You must self-isolate while awaiting the results of this confirmatory PCR test. Your care home may have provided you with a PCR test to use in case of a positive result. Alternatively, you can order a PCR test via **https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test**

**If your test result is positive, you and your household must self-isolate following Government guidelines. You must not proceed with work.**

**Registering Kits**

The results of all lateral flow device tests **must** be registered (whether positive, indeterminate, negative or void) at:

<https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result>

We are monitoring compliance and so it is important that care homes register all results, as understanding results is crucial for public health teams to understand the prevalence of coronavirus in care homes across the country and be able to support the care sector appropriately.

It is therefore very important that care homes have made the necessary arrangements with staff self-testing at home to ensure that all results from lateral flow device tests are registered online.

Registering and logging results should be done within **24 hours** of taking a test. This is to ensure that results can assist NHS Test and Trace in understanding transmission and prevalence.

Registering results is vitally important for three key reasons;

1 - Results link directly through to the Test, Trace, Protect service which will ensure that contacts are traced as quickly as possible to prevent further ongoing transmission

2 - A failure to register kits may meant that you will be unable to order more when needed

3 - That access to the financial support package could be impeded

Care homes should keep an internal record of the number of tests completed each day and their results. Care homes will be asked to input the total number of tests completed each day and the number of negatives into a single survey administered by the capacity tracker.

***Results from all staff, visitors and visiting professionals LFD tests must still be registered, even if negative.***

**Advice for safe disposal of lateral flow test waste**

**If the test is negative**

* Drain any remaining reagent into sink or toilet.
* Place lateral flow test kit into the domestic waste bag (normally a “black” bag).
* Do not place the test into any recycling waste streams.

**If the test is positive**

* Drain any remaining reagent into sink or toilet.
* Place the lateral flow test kit into a secure bag and keep this in a safe place for 72 hours. After this time place in the domestic waste bag (normally a “black bag”)
* Do not place the test into any recycling waste streams.

As a COVID positive individual in self isolation from this point, you are required to ensure that waste that has been in direct contact with you is held for 72 hours before entering the domestic waste stream.

**Ordering**

The online replenishment portal is very similar to the current process you follow for ordering the standard PCR test kits that are used for regular staff testing. The only difference being that from this portal you will select LFD test kits, rather than your standard PCR test kit order. You should continue to order regular PCR kits for staff as per usual.

Once you have placed an order, your delivery will provide you with enough LFD test kits for you to provide each staff member with one box of 25 test kits, which should last them 1 month of testing. Within this order you will also be provided with a confirmatory PCR, for each staff member, which will be part of the replenishment package, and is used should an individual receives a positive LFD.

Please only place an order if you require a replenishment of LFD test kits. There is no obligation to place an order if you have enough LFD test kits already in your home.

As a reminder, these LFD test kits are a new technology which provide a rapid Covid-19 test result in 30 minutes and do not require a lab to process. These should be used in addition to regular PCR testing.

**Creating a user account**

We are happy to announce that the function to create a user account when self-registering your LFD result will be available from Friday 5 February onwards. This will save a significant amount of time during the registration of your LFD result, as your details will be saved; removing the need to enter in your personal details each time you register an LFD result. Please note you will need to enter all details when creating the account. Once the account is created, the amount of time taken to register will decrease.

You will be required to input an email address and phone number, as part of the account creation and verification process, so please make sure you have access to an email and phone.

Please note, if you do not want to create an account, the single registration journey is still available.

To find out more, please join our webinars on Tuesday 9 February from 13:00 – 14:30 using the link below. We will prioritise the first section of the webinar to run through the new user account process.

[**https://event.webcasts.com/viewer/portal.jsp?ei=1369434&tp\_key=296e54cdc9**](https://event.webcasts.com/viewer/portal.jsp?ei=1369434&tp_key=296e54cdc9)

If you are not able to attend the webinar at this time, please sign up and a recording of the session will be made available to you after the webinar has been completed.

**For further information, guidance will be published by Monday 8 February on the Gov.uk website.**

**Ongoing webinars and training**

The Department of Health and social care (DHSC) are continuing to operate regular care home testing webinars,

You can sign up for the webinars here:

[**https://event.webcasts.com/viewer/portal.jsp?ei=1369434&tp\_key=296e54cdc9**](https://event.webcasts.com/viewer/portal.jsp?ei=1369434&tp_key=296e54cdc9)

These webinars last 90 minutes and give detailed information about all aspects of care home testing. The session will include a live Q&A with representatives from the national care home testing team, who will be able to answer your questions and address any concerns in the session.

If you are not able to attend the webinars, please sign up and a recording of the session will be made available to you after the webinar has been completed.