



Letter to Health Boards:

Chief Executives

Medical Directors

Directors of Public Health

24 April 2020

Dear colleague

Re: Mitigating risk of introduction and spread of Covid-19 in care homes

Central to our response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been the safety and protection of the most vulnerable people in our communities. We recognise that people living in care homes and other similar residential settings will be amongst the most vulnerable, with many relying on close personal care. As we learn more about the virus and its impact on care homes we are introducing a number of additional measures to ensure that risk to care home residents and staff is reduced where possible.

1. In Wales our strategic aim is to prevent deaths. This can only be achieved by reducing the risk of introduction of Covid-19 into the care homes and ensuring all staff are practicing infection prevention precautions and using PPE appropriately and safely. Welsh Government has been working very closely with PHW, LA Environmental Health and Social Care teams, HBs and Care Inspectorate Wales for the past week to ensure that proactive engagement can be undertaken at scale and contact is made with each unaffected home every three days. This proactive prevent initiative will be commence across Wales from April 27th.

Health Boards and Trusts to be aware of this plan and support the care homes to practice Infection prevention and control according to the UK COVID-19 IP&C guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-care-homes>

2. A prompt response to a possible case or cluster of cases of Covid-19 in a care home is necessary to support the health protection response and minimise harm. Diagnostic capability has increased in Wales and we will now be offering testing to all possible cases of Covid-19 in care homes. When notified of a possible case in a care home diagnostic testing should be undertaken within 24 hours.

Health Boards and Trusts need to ensure that resources are in place to undertake the sampling within the care home and to work closely with Public Health Wales Health Protection and Diagnostic services to facilitate testing within 24 hours.

3. All individuals being discharged from hospital to live in care homes regardless of whether or not they were admitted to hospital with Covid-19 must be tested for the virus. People who are being transferred between care homes and any new

admissions from the community must also be tested for Covid-19. Discharge, transfer or admission will not take place until the result of a Covid-19 test is available and has shown to be negative.

We are issuing updated Welsh Government guidance to reflect these changes - *COVID-19 Hospital Discharge Service Requirements (Wales)* and *Guidance for stepdown of infection control precautions and discharging COVID-19 patients*. Public Health Wales will also be updating its guidance on the *Admission and Care of Residents during COVID-19 in a Residential Care Setting in Wales*. These are available on the Welsh Government's web page for COVID-19, <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

[Health Boards and Trusts need to ensure that systems are in place to sample / test individuals 48 hours before planned discharge from hospital and to ensure that resources are in place to enable sampling of care home residents or those in the community with planned admissions / transfers to care homes.](#)

4. Delivering safe care to residents of care homes will become more challenging if a considerable number of staff are self-isolating. There is now the diagnostic capacity available to ensure all social care workers and those in their households with symptoms consistent with Covid-19 can be tested promptly just as there is for NHS staff and their families. While the model for the delivery of the test will vary across Wales it is expected that the test will be undertaken within 48 hours of request for testing.

Health Boards and Trusts need to work with local partners to ensure that the testing centres and other sampling arrangements are co-ordinated to ensure that all social care workers requiring testing can access the testing within 48 hours.

All of you are actively engaged with the care sector and will be providing support to ensure they maintain safe care for their residents and we are grateful for all your hard work.

Yours sincerely



Dr Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer



Albert Heaney
Deputy Director General