



Registered Providers and
Responsible Individuals of Care Home Services
for Adults and Children in Wales
Chief Executives Local Health Board
Chief Executives Local Authorities
Local Authority Directors of Social Services
Association of Directors of Social Services
Welsh Local Government Association

22 April 2020

Dear Colleagues

The safety and protection of the most vulnerable people in our communities has been an urgent priority in our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. 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. We are working to ensure that care home residents and staff are fully supported and are putting additional measures in place to achieve this.

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>

Public Health Wales, Local Authority Environmental Health and Social Care teams Health Boards and Care Inspectorate Wales are working closely with the sector to minimise harm from COVID-19. Care Homes will be supported in the management of any possible cases of COVID-19 and management of outbreaks including the co-ordination of referrals and access to testing facilities for staff, residents and family members if required.

As we work towards reducing the number of homes affected by COVID-19 the public health system will support all care homes to ensure that introduction of the virus to the home is minimised, and that all staff are familiar with the necessary Infection Prevention and Control procedures and on the appropriate use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Care homes may be at increased risk of COVID-19 infection from people returning from hospital and from new residents. We will therefore be testing all individuals being discharged from hospital to live in care homes regardless of whether or not they were admitted to hospital with COVID-19. We will extend that testing to people who are being transferred between care homes and for new admissions from the community. We also intend to increase testing within care homes as more testing capacity becomes available.

We will make sure all individuals due to be discharged from hospital or transferred to a care home but have tested positive are provided with appropriate step down care in local settings, such as in community hospitals which will be equipped for infection control and can also offer therapeutic support to aid individual recovery. They will be tested again to ensure a negative result before returning to their care home.

There will be an agreed discharge pathway for people who test negative prior to discharge from hospital. As testing can never be 100% reliable the national policy of 14 day supported self isolation for each individual will be necessary.

Albert Heaney wrote to local authority leaders on 8 April, summarising the testing facilities available for social care staff and testing within care homes. To update you, the limit of 15 tests per local authority has now been removed and we are working with partners to increase capacity. We are exploring how the process to access tests for social care staff can be streamlined, through the use of Care Inspectorate Wales' online system.

We are also considering the needs of staff who may not be able to access drive through testing arrangements, by making local testing services available.

We understand care providers and families will continue to worry about the impact of the virus in the community and particularly in care homes and we will continue to collect and publish data regularly.

The Minister for Health and Social Services will be making an oral statement on testing on Wednesday 22 April, to provide an update on testing of COVID-19 for critical workers.

Thank you for your continued efforts in responding to this emergency.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Frank Atherton', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Dr Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Albert Heaney', consisting of a stylized initial 'A' followed by a horizontal line.

Albert Heaney
Deputy Director General