Dear Colleagues

First Minister’s Parliamentary COVID-19 statement - Updated advice on adult care home visiting

We wanted to provide you with updated guidance on visits in and out of adult care homes. This follows the First Minister’s Parliamentary COVID-19 statement yesterday relating to further population based guidance and measures to take effect from midnight on Friday (17 December) to stem the flow of transmission of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2.

As you will appreciate, this is a fast moving situation as updated estimates of Omicron’s transmissibility in Scotland and vaccine response emerges. This has necessitated a further letter from us around additional protective measures for adult care homes to support visiting in and out of the home.

The guidance announced by the First Minister on 14 December 2021, for the general public was as follows:

*When socialising at home or in indoor public places individuals should limit the number of households represented in your group to a maximum of three households at any time, with everyone encouraged to take a lateral flow test before meeting.*
Additional protective measures for adult care homes

The additional protective measures for adult care homes outlined below aim to balance the current Covid-19 risk and the need to keep people safe in line with clinical advice provided about the risks of Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 at this time, and what actions may help reduce the risk of infection. However, they are based on the principle that, where it is safe to do so, people living in care homes should continue be supported to see and spend time with those important to them as outlined in Open with Care visiting guidance. Care home staff have worked hard to increase opportunities for people to more safely connect with others, recognising that this is essential to the wellbeing of both residents and their families / friends.

The additional measures also recognise the importance of ensuring all existing Infection Prevention Control (IPC) measures remain in place; all visitors should undertake a Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test before attending; vaccinations and boosters are to be encouraged; and no-one with symptoms or identified as a close contact meet with residents in and out with the care home.

The additional measures are as follows:

**Indoor visiting**
- Adult care homes should continue to support indoor visits. However in line with the recommendation for the general public to limit the number of households meeting indoors to three, we recommend that there should be no more than two households meeting with a resident at one time inside the care home. (22.12.21 – see further guidance in annex below)
- As before there should be no restrictions placed on frequency of visiting. This will be guided by care home arrangements, which take into account the ability of the home to manage the number of people attending at any one time to ensure safe visiting practices can be maintained.
- The duration of visits should not be limited if visiting practices can be maintained with strong mitigations.
- Anyone who visits an adult care home – family/ friends (including children) and visiting professionals should undertake an LFD test before every visit (previously this was twice weekly for regular visitors). Exemptions in exceptional circumstances eg end of life / distress but all IPC measures to be followed. (22.12.21 – see further guidance in annex below)
- All visitors to care homes should wear a Fluid Resistant Surgical mask (FRSM) as per Open with Care guidance.
- For adult care homes with a COVID-19 outbreak, care homes can support residents to choose a named visitor who may visit the resident in their private room if the local Health Protection Team has agreed such visits can happen. See guidance: [Coronavirus (COVID-19): named visitor during outbreaks - letter and guidance for care home sector - gov.scot](www.gov.scot)

**Visits out of the care home**
Adult Care homes who do not have a COVID-19 outbreak, should continue to support residents to undertake visits out, but the following is advised:
- residents are recommended to undertake an LFD test before leaving the care home and after returning from visits out (test every other day for 14 days), unless this would
cause harm or distress. If the resident returns with symptoms, they must isolate as detailed in the Public Health Scotland care home guidance and get a PCR test. (22.12.21- see further advice on approach in annex below)

- ask anyone meeting residents out with the care home to undertake regular LFD testing, and receive a negative LFD test on the day of the visit.
- encourage everyone – residents and those they are visiting - to have had their COVID-19 vaccinations including booster if eligible.
- residents are recommended to avoid mixing with a large number of people indoors.
- encourage everyone to follow good hand hygiene handwashing, face coverings and physical distancing wherever possible.
- On return to the care home the respiratory screening checklist as per the ARHAI Scotland Winter Respiratory Addendum should be completed by either the resident or carer. (added 22-12-21)

**Activities within the care home / communal areas**

Adult care homes who do not have an outbreak should continue to support residents to participate in activities within the care home – these are an essential part of care home life and are vital to wellbeing. However, the following steps are recommended:

- as before large groups of visitors such as choirs and carol singers are currently not recommended inside the care home (existing advice).
- staff should continue to wear fluid resistant surgical masks (FRSM) and maintain 1m + physical distance from residents, each other and visitors (existing advice) unless providing personal care or for any other reason.
- increase ventilation where possible, continue to maintain temperature comfort and follow the IPC measures as detailed guidance contained in the Winter Respiratory IPC Addendum.

It is worth noting that care homes will have put in place arrangements to support visiting and festive activities over the Christmas period. It is important that such arrangements continue as long as the protective measures outlined above can be maintained. Family/ friends are recommended to make arrangements with care homes in advance of visiting so the number of people attending at any one time can be managed safely taking into account the size and layout of the care home. (22.12.21 – see further guidance in annex below)

The measures outlined above are in addition to those set out in our letter of 9 December 2021 which strongly recommended daily LFD tests for all care home staff.

**Advice for staff on activities and encounters**

With positive cases of the Omicron variant continuing to rise in Scotland, staff are asked to be especially careful at this time of year.

For your own protection, as well as that of your friends and family, colleagues and those you support, you will want to think about limiting social encounters in line with guidance for the general public. Attending social events, such a large gatherings, could increase your own risk of being infected or of bringing infection to the home. The risk of either catching the virus or passing it on to others remains very high given the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2. If you do meet people socially or attend social events, as outlined by the First Minister, please follow the recommended limit on the number of households represented in your group to a maximum of three and test before you go.
Wherever possible, vehicle sharing should be avoided with anyone outside of household or support bubbles. Where this can’t be avoided the advice in the ARHAI Scotland winter respiratory addendum should be followed. As required by the law, in line with the general public, unless exempt, staff must also wear face coverings if they are travelling on public transport.

We also continue to encourage staff and residents to get their booster vaccination as soon as possible as it will extend the protection gained from the first two doses and help reduce the risk of you needing to go to hospital due to coronavirus this winter.

The changing nature of the pandemic can mean that the law can quickly change. It is important that individual care home providers continue to check and comply with all legal obligations on them to be sure the care home is a safe place to visit and with any health and safety or other obligations in respect of it being a safe workplace. This guidance does not supersede or provide any advice on those matters. Independent advice should be sought on compliance with any of these matters if needed.

Finally, this is an evolving picture and it is likely that we will need to provide you with updated advice. In an effort to support adult care homes to be kept up to date on guidance and protective measures in relation to winter transmission and Omicron we have condensed the guidance issued in letters since 9 December 2021 into one webpage. This webpage will be reviewed and updated as required. Additionally we are in the process of updating our, and NHS inform, webpages to reflect recent advice issued on:

- Adult Care Home LFD staff testing
- social care and community based testing overview
- Self-isolation for social care staff
- NHS inform guidance on exemption for self-isolation

Please check the web links as these pages will be updated regularly

You should also be aware that on 17 December Public Health Scotland published updated care home guidance COVID-19 - information and guidance for care home settings (adults and older people) (added 22-12-21)

In the meantime, we would like once again to thank you and your staff for the exceptional work you are doing in responding to the pandemic.

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Annex 1 Further additional guidance

Christmas arrangements
As noted in the letter, care homes will have put in place arrangements to support visiting and festive activities over the Christmas period. It is important that such arrangements continue as long as the protective measures can be maintained.

The guidance recommended the number of households visiting each resident at any one time is limited to two. It is recognised that a degree of flexibility in numbers visiting may be required over the three-day festive period which takes account of the circumstances of the care home, resident and family. As per the Public Health Scotland care home guidance, care homes can assesses and monitor visitor numbers, taking into account the ability of the home to manage the number of people attending at any one time to ensure safe visiting practices over the festive period can be maintained. As part of this assessment, the care home will need to consider the total number of visitors with a resident at any one time. For example, it may be that the home can support a spouse, a son and a daughter from three different households but would be unable to accommodate five people from two households due to the size and layout of the care home.

Family/ friends are recommended to make arrangements with care homes in advance of visiting so the number of people attending at any one time can be managed safely.

Bringing gifts into care homes
Please note that gifts can be brought into the care home. Practising good hand hygiene is important when touching any items in the care home, including Christmas presents and decorations, which do not require to be wiped down or quarantined for 72 hours.

Visits out - testing before and after outings
In line with advice for the general public, friends and family members are encouraged to take a LFD test before meeting with residents outwith the care home, particularly if an overnight stay is planned. It is recommended that families / friends and residents are asked the ARHAI Scotland respiratory screening questions in advance of the visit.

Residents are recommended to undertake an LFD test before leaving the care home to meet with individuals indoors and after returning from visits out, unless this would cause harm or distress. The approach to testing should be proportionate and follow a risk assessed approach on a case-by-case basis by the care home manager, taking advice from clinicians and local Health Protection teams where necessary. This is because certain types of activity are inherently higher risk than others, for example meeting a number of people indoors and overnight stays. If a resident attends a Christmas celebration with family indoors, testing before leaving the care home and every other day for 14 days is recommended. In contrast, for residents who leave the care home to go on a short walk outside of the care home with limited contact with others, testing is not necessary. For residents who regularly attend day clubs, activities and go on outings with family etc, eg once a week or more, are recommended to test 2-3 times per week in line with the advice for the general public.

To note that resident testing is not mandatory and should always be done with consent or provision, for those without capacity, made otherwise. It should not be carried out if it would cause distress or harm.
It is important to note that testing is one form of protection - other infection prevention and control measures as detailed in the ARHAI Scotland Winter Respiratory Addendum protections such as handwashing, physical distancing, face coverings / masks, symptom vigilance and vaccination are important in reducing the spread of COVID-19. Symptom vigilance amongst residents and their friends and family when planning outings away from the care home is essential.

For all residents returning to the care home as per PHS care homes guidance, they should also be assessed using the ARHAI Scotland respiratory screening questions in advance of their immediate return. This will allow the care home to risk assess and inform staff of the status of the resident respiratory status and potential risks for all respiratory pathogens and not just COVID. If a resident returns with symptoms or answer any yes to any of screening questions, they must isolate as detailed in the Public Health Scotland care home guidance and get a PCR test.

**Who should do the test on residents?**
The decision on this would be best made by care home staff with the resident. However, this could be the resident if they are able and willing, care home staff or a family member if able and willing.

**What if a resident is unable or refuses to undertake a test before or after a visit out?**
Testing of residents before and on return from the care home is not mandatory and should only be done with consent. If a resident is unable or unwilling to do a test then they should not be prevented from leaving the care home to see others. However, it would be important to ensure that the resident and those whom they are visiting are fully aware of the importance of handwashing, physical distancing face coverings, distancing as well as vaccination in reducing the spread of COVID-19. As noted above anyone meeting residents out with the care home should be asked to undertake regular LFD testing, and receive a negative LFD test on the day of the visit.

**Where should the visitor test?**
As indicated in previous guidance, care homes have the discretion of supporting visitor testing at the care home or recommending visitors test before they come to the care home through community testing routes.

**What if a visitor refuses to test before visiting?**
Testing of all visitors is recommended but it is not mandatory. If someone refuses to test, then staff should discuss this with them to understand the reasons why. If they still refuse, it is recommended that the individual visits as long as IPC measures are followed. There will be circumstances where essential visitors may need to visit in urgent situations so it would be important to support such visits.

**Which kits should be used to test residents?**
Care homes should use kits supplied to the care home by NSS. NSS is working to ensure that care homes continue to have sufficient supplies. Care homes are advised to use up existing stocks of kits of both Innova and Orient Genes before requesting additional supplies. If there is an immediate issue with stock levels then NSS can be contacted on 0800 008 6587. Note: if additional buffer solution is needed for Innova tests then this can also be requested via the helpline.
How should you record resident tests?
Tests for residents should be recorded on the NSS portal. Welcome - COVID Testing Portal (service-now.com). The portal will be updated to have a category for “care home – resident” but until this time, it is advised that the category “care homes – visitor” is used.