

**Y Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Health and Social Services Group**



**Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government**

To: Registered Providers and Responsible Individuals of
Care Home Services for Adults and Children in Wales
Local Authority Directors of Social Services
LHB Chief Executives

9th April 2020

Dear Colleagues

We are acutely aware of the growing impact of COVID-19 in care homes for adults and children and other residential settings in Wales. We appreciate the challenges you are facing in the sector and within individual services and are extremely grateful for the continued hard work and effort from both yourselves as providers and from your staff. Thank you.

Care home services have an essential role to play in helping to manage this emergency by ensuring that people can be discharged safely from hospital when they no longer need to be there. We recognise that there will be a number of considerations to take into account and that you will need to be satisfied that you can provide safe care for that individual.

A number of care home services are already caring for residents with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19. Public Health Wales will work with you, and assist you so that you can continue to provide the best possible care for your residents and support for your staff, whilst ensuring that the potential for transmission of the infection is minimised. In this regard Public Health Wales has produced the attached guidance. We ask that you help us in understanding the overall capacity in the adult care home sector by signing up to the new care and support capacity tool. Please use the tool and keep your vacancy information up to date.

We are asking commissioners to make use of the information available via the dashboards in order to reduce an unnecessary calls to providers.

You can sign up for the tool by accessing: <https://www.dewis.wales> and clicking the 'Sign up' option, using the email address we have already sent you.

You can access support to update your vacancy information by calling 07773 486891 between 8am and 8pm daily. Or via help@dewis.wales.

If you consider there to be imminent risks to the continuity of care, such as the potential closure of a service, you should raise this with your local authority and Care Inspectorate Wales without delay.

Since 1st April, local government has had an established process to manage the prioritisation and referral of social care workers for testing. This covers both local authority social care staff and staff employed by commissioned providers who are symptomatic.

Arrangements have been put in place for all care homes to have access to the out of hours or 111 professional line which is staffed by local GPs. If you do not already have access to that number please contact your local health board directly. We will continue to review and update our response to ensure that care homes get the ongoing advice and support they require.

Here is a link to information about fast-track requests which will enable you to check whether someone has an Attorney or Deputy in Covid-19 that has been published by the Office of the Public Guardian:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-staff-searching-our-registers-of-attorneys-and-deputies>

Welsh Government will support you by working with commissioners to ensure fair and prompt payment for existing care commitments and additional care provided during this pandemic, recognising that some costs are higher than usual. We have also been working with local authorities and some providers to identify the additional costs that are arising for social care services as a result of the COVID -19 outbreak. An announcement about funding support will be made shortly

The attached Public Health Wales guidance which is relevant to both adult and children's care homes provides detailed information to support you in caring for your residents. We have highlighted the key points below:

Be alert for staff or residents with symptoms of COVID-19. **You should be extra vigilant for any resident or staff member who has symptoms of COVID-19.** This includes recent onset of:

- a new continuous cough and/or
- a high temperature ($\geq 37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$)

If possible, proactively take the temperature of residents twice per day, for early identification of a fever. You should be aware that older people in care homes may not show the same symptoms. Some may not develop fever but may have flu-like symptoms, new onset confusion, reduced alertness, reduced mobility or diarrhoea. You should therefore look out for any change in the general wellbeing of residents as a possible sign of infection. This is especially important if you are already looking after one or more people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

Take immediate action in the following circumstances:

Staff with symptoms

Advise any member of staff with these symptoms to go home and to self-isolate for 7 days. After 7 days:

- if you do not have a high temperature, you do not need to self-isolate
- if you still have a high temperature, keep self-isolating until your temperature returns to normal

Staff may return to work if the only symptom after 7 days is a cough, which can last for several weeks after the infection has gone.

Residents with symptoms

Isolate any resident who has symptoms in a single room with a separate bathroom where possible, to reduce contact with other residents and staff. Where individual rooms are not available, residents should be separated between those that have symptoms and those that do not. Staff should also be allocated so that they are either dealing with symptomatic or well residents but not both.

Ensure enhanced, effective handwashing and infection prevention and control measures are instigated.

Restrict non-essential visitors to the home.

Notify Public Health Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales

COVID-19 is a notifiable disease. You should tell Public Health Wales if you have a suspected or confirmed case or cases.

You should do this by telephoning the following number: **0300 00 300 32**. Please have details of all of the symptomatic staff and residents available.

One of Public Health Wales' advisors will take further details from you and provide advice on how to reduce the risk of the infection spreading in addition to the immediate steps taken above.

You are also required to notify Care Inspectorate Wales.

Discharge to Care Home or Residential setting

As part of the national effort, the care sector also plays a vital role in accepting people as they are discharged from hospital – both because recuperation is better in non-acute settings, and because hospitals need to have enough beds to treat acutely sick patients. People may also be admitted to a care home from their own home.

To help you with informing your decision about whether you are able to provide safe care for the individual and to plan for the admission you can contact the Public Health Wales (24/7) health protection team on **0300 00 300 32**.

They can help with risk assessment and provide detailed further advice on caring safely for a person with COVID-19, taking into account the individual circumstances of your residential setting.

Dealing with staff absence from work

Any member of staff with symptoms of COVID-19 should stay away from work for 7 days or until the symptoms, other than a cough, have resolved.

If a member of staff lives with someone who has symptoms, they should not attend work for 14 days from the day that person's symptoms started. If the staff member becomes symptomatic during that period they should stay away from work for 7 days from when their symptoms start even if it means self-isolating for longer than 14 days.

Staff at high risk

Any member of staff who has been informed that they are at very high risk because they have one of a number of serious health conditions, should be shielding from any contact with other people and should not therefore attend work.

Any member of staff who has been informed that they may be a higher risk because of their age or because they have a long term condition such as heart disease, asthma etc., should not work in an environment where they may be at increased risk of becoming infected with COVID-19.

Members of staff who live in a household with others who are shielding or more vulnerable do not also have to isolate.

They may continue to attend work but should be extra vigilant about symptoms and ensuring social distancing and isolation where at all possible at home. Further advice is contained in the attached Public Health Wales guidance.

Staff who are pregnant

New advice for pregnant women who are working in the NHS and other work settings has been published

Women who are less than 28 weeks pregnant should practise social distancing but can continue working in a patient-facing role, provided the necessary precautions are taken.

Women who are more than 28 weeks pregnant, or have underlying health conditions, should avoid direct patient contact.

Details are in this link:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/2020-04-03-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-in-pregnancy.pdf>

Again, we thank you for your help and support during this emergency.

Yours sincerely



Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer



Albert Heaney
Deputy Director General