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All Scottish Care Homes

22 April 2020

I am writing to provide further detail on the procedures in place for testing care home staff and residents for COVID-19. Both of these groups are a priority for testing and I want to provide further detail on the actions that have been put in place to ensure this happens.

On 9 April, I wrote to NHS Boards, Councils and Integration Joint Boards to ask them to review arrangements in place to enable all staff in health and social care to access testing and reminded them that social care workers must be prioritised alongside NHS staff in arrangements for testing. Since then there has been work carried out by NHS Boards to put in place local pathways with Health and Social Care Partnerships to enable social care staff to access testing, including clear lines for the independent and third sector workforce in care homes and care at home settings.

On 15 April, the First Minister announced that all symptomatic patients in a care home would be clinically assessed and, where appropriate, offered testing for COVID-19. This provides additional reassurance to both our vulnerable elderly population and their families, and those working in care homes. Following this, the Chief Nursing Officer wrote to NHS Boards to provide further detail on this change in infection management procedures and to ask Health Boards to liaise with Health Protection Teams to ensure care homes are supported in the transition to this new increased testing regime.

Additional guidance was issued on Friday 17 April from Health Protection Scotland for those working in social or community care and residential settings (<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-information-and-guidance-for-social-or-community-care-and-residential-settings/>). Contact details for local health protection teams can be found on page 25 of this guidance. If you believe your Care Home has a resident or residents with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 you should contact your local health protection team who will be able to support you in putting in place arrangements for testing.

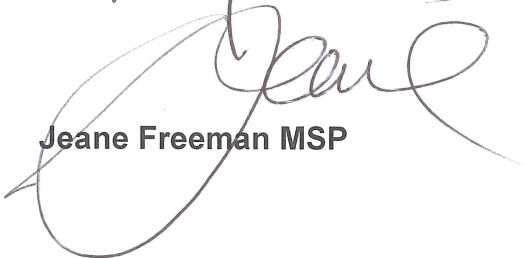
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Please keep in mind that older people may have atypical presentations so staff must be alert to this when making decisions about testing for COVID-19. Staff who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or where a member of their household has symptoms, must self isolate in line with the current public health guidance. They should discuss with their employer whether testing, either of them or the member of their household, to support them to return to work is appropriate in their circumstances; and their employer should then refer them using local arrangements for the testing of health and social care staff. The testing of staff working in locations where there have been multiple cases of COVID-19 is being kept under review and further advice will be issued on this in due course.

Lastly, I would like to thank you for the commitment and dedication your staff are demonstrating during these unprecedented times. I understand this is a deeply concerning time for your staff, their families and the public, and I am alert to the concerns that have been raised with regards to social care staff accessing testing. I hope the information I have provided above provides some reassurance.

I have copied this letter to the Health Board Chief Executives.

Kind regards

Jeane Freeman MSP

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