



27 January 2022

To: Adult social care service providers

CC: Directors of Adult Social Services, Directors of Public Health and wider stakeholders

Changes to restrictions and testing in Adult Social Care

Thank you for all the work you and your staff have done throughout the pandemic in keeping vulnerable people safe, especially during this challenging winter period.

As restrictions ease across the country with the removal of Plan B measures for the general public, I am writing to inform you about the implications this has on adult social care.

Having reviewed the latest public health evidence from our clinical advisers in UKHSA and the SAGE Social Care Working Group, and with on-going robust infection prevention and control measures in place, we are now in a position to ease the restrictions implemented in response to the Omicron variant.

From Monday 31st January, we are:

- Reducing visiting restrictions for residents:
 - There will be no limit on the number of visitors a resident can have and no requirements to test or isolate after visits out (providing these visits are not deemed to be “high risk”).
 - The isolation period will be reduced from 14 days to a maximum period of 10 days.

Additionally, by Wednesday 16th February, we are:

- Changing the asymptomatic staff testing regime for all staff in adult social care to pre-shift lateral flow tests and removing PCR testing.
- PCR testing will continue for regular monthly care home resident testing and outbreak testing, other staff testing (e.g. when symptomatic or when a contact) as well as in all Vivaldi research care homes.

Detailed arrangements will be set out in updated guidance, which we will publish in the week beginning Monday 31st January 2022.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Armstrong

Director of Adult Social Care Delivery and Covid-19 Response,
Department of Health and Social Care

Annex A – Further Detail

Reducing restrictions for residents

As the situation is improving, and we know more about the virus, we are able to follow the latest scientific advice and reduce restrictions on visiting in care homes while scaling back isolation requirements. However, we are still seeing high numbers of cases of Covid-19, and it remains extremely important that we continue with the vaccination programme, testing, and proper IPC, including PPE (which we have made free to Adult Social Care providers until March 2023).

We will continue to emphasise the importance of always supporting visits from essential care givers, even during outbreaks. Essential care givers are family members or friends who provide companionship or help with a resident's care needs. We would encourage all care providers to make residents' friends and family members aware of the opportunity to take on this vital role for their loved one.

Increasing to pre-shift lateral flow testing for all ASC staff, removing regular staff PCR testing and keeping monthly PCR testing for residents

For all asymptomatic adult social care staff, we are moving to pre-shift lateral flow testing and removing weekly PCR testing. Based on SAGE Social Care Working Group advice, this regime provides better protection than the current regular testing regime. As restrictions are relaxed for care home residents and for the general population, testing continues to be essential for providing the protections needed to support this relaxation of restrictions.

Pre-shift lateral flow testing for staff will help to rapidly identify and isolate people who are highly likely to spread the virus, helping to break the chain of transmission, prevent hospitalisations and save lives. This is supported by evidence that shows lateral flow tests are highly effective at quickly identifying asymptomatic people with high viral loads who are most infectious. While PCRs help to identify cases including those with lower viral loads, these individuals are likely to be less infectious, and the frequency of lateral flow testing will help to ensure cases can be detected quickly across the week.

This change applies only to regular asymptomatic testing for staff meaning PCR tests will remain available for symptomatic staff and residents. Outbreak testing and monthly resident testing will also remain unchanged, and therefore, whole home PCR and lateral flow testing should still occur in the first week of a care home outbreak (on day 1 and once again between day 4-7). Please note that in line with removing regular PCR testing for staff, there will no longer be weekly staff PCR testing during an outbreak. Staff should instead continue their new asymptomatic regular testing regime of pre-shift lateral flow testing.

As a result of adult social care services following the previous testing regimes, cases have been identified more quickly helping to reduce transmission, infections, hospital admissions and save lives. Of course, as with all testing regimes, these can only offer the most protection and reduce infection if the testing regime is followed.

These changes will apply across all adult social care staff including staff who access tests individually, such as Personal Assistants and those working for local authorities or charities etc. Adult social care services should implement these changes by 16 February 2022 or earlier.

From Friday 28th January 2022, home care providers and wider extra care/ supported living settings will be able to order lateral flow tests via the same Test & Trace organisational testing portal they currently use for ordering staff PCR kits in bulk. Providers will be contacted on how to do this shortly. Home care providers and wider extra care/ supported living settings should switch from weekly PCR to daily lateral flow testing as soon as their staff have lateral flow test kits, given the change in testing offers substantial increases in protection compared to their current regime of weekly PCR only.

For adult social care organisations who already order their staff lateral flows in bulk from Test & Trace (care homes, high risk extra care/ supported living settings and day care centres), the number of lateral flow test kits provided in your orders will be increased to reflect this change in policy from Friday 28th January. There will be further communications from UKHSA for all services on next steps and details about webinars which will go through the clinical rationale for the testing changes, how these changes will support you to keep staff and the people you care for as safe as possible, and how we will support you to implement the changes.

Care homes involved in the VIVALDI research study should await further guidance from UKHSA.

These changes will be updated in the adult social care guidance documents as soon as possible, but please implement from the dates outlined above.