



# Department of Health & Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP  
Minister of State for Care*

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All Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Social Care

28 May 2020

Dear APPG Co-Chairs,

Thank you for your letter on 15 May regarding testing in the social care sector. I am replying in my capacity as the Minister of State for Care.

I am grateful to you for setting out some of the information you have heard from stakeholders in your regular calls. Similarly, I speak frequently to stakeholders across the sector and I am aware of the concerns you raise - and I always welcome feedback as it's essential, now more than ever, that we are well informed about the realities at the frontline

COVID-19 continues to present an unprecedented challenge for social care. Since this pandemic began, we have been working flat out to support the social care sector – drawing on all the levers that Government has to help social care providers look after the people in their care. We know that care providers across the country have been doing their utmost to keep those they look after safe and well in the most challenging circumstances.

Care homes are on the frontline in the fight against COVID-19 and we are determined that staff have everything they need to keep themselves and their residents safe. Testing is a crucial part of this. It helps prevent and control outbreaks and means steps can be taken to reduce the spread the virus and protect the most vulnerable. The first time a care home suspects an outbreak of coronavirus, the care home manager should continue to contact their local PHE Health Protection Teams to arrange a swab test kit to be delivered. Subsequent testing will be done through the DHSC targeted testing approach.

Building on this initial testing system, we have been increasing the access to tests for the care sector through multiple channels. We are now testing all care home residents and staff, regardless of symptoms. All older-adult and dementia care homes can access testing for all residents and asymptomatic staff June 6<sup>th</sup>. All other care homes will be tested as capacity expands and there is the opportunity for Directors of Public Health to prioritise other categories of care homes now for testing, based on their local knowledge.

Symptomatic domiciliary care workers are able to be tested through the self-referral or employer referral portal. We are working on a pilot test of all domiciliary care workers and care recipients in a defined area.

Since the start of the pandemic, over 198,000 workers in care settings and over 177,000 care home residents have been tested through DHSC and PHE testing routes.

Expansion of testing to other care settings and retesting of care homes will continue and be guided by clinical advice on relative priority and available testing capacity. On 11 May we launched a new online portal to help care homes arrange deliveries of coronavirus test kits. To date nearly 400,000 test kits have been delivered to 2971 care homes. We know how important it is that care homes receive their test results as quickly as possible and we aim to return test results within 48 hours of a swab being taken, or within 72 hours for a home test.

- Around 50% satellite, mobile and regional test results are returned within 24 hours, 90% are returned within 48 hours.
- Most test results are returned within 24 – 48 hours.

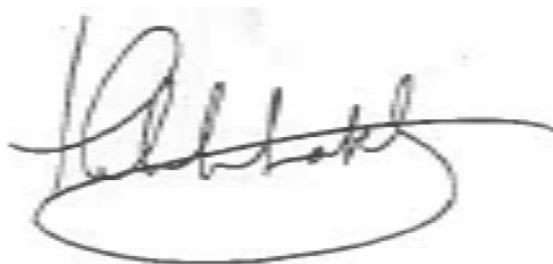
We know many of those in care homes will have specific needs, including residents with dementia. That is why we have provided detailed guidance and training materials to ensure staff can administer tests safely and effectively, and with due regard for the residents' best interests. Carers and nurses who will be swabbing residents in care homes should also complete the online care home swabbing competency assessment before carrying out swabbing.

We recognise that the current swab test can be particularly challenging to administer with some individuals, particularly those with dementia. We are working to offer alternative testing options. However, this will take time – particularly to reach the kind of scale that is needed - and the immediate priority is to provide access to widespread testing at scale.

All the above work on testing has taken place alongside a targeted action plan for Adult Social Care released 15 April and the Care Home support package released 15 May. Together these actively ensure the safety of those in care homes by coordinating **infection prevention measures, comprehensive testing, clinical support, local authority support** and **workforce recruitment**. This has been supported with an additional £600 million to support care home providers through a new Adult Social Care Infection Control Fund.

I do hope you find this useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.

**HELEN WHATELY**