

The Department of Health and Social Care Coronavirus National Testing Programme

Whole Home Testing for care home staff and residents

Information sheet for care providers

Updated 27.07.2020

The Department of Health and Social Care launched the next stages in its Adult Social Care Testing Strategy on the 3 July. This document outlines the key testing provision within that strategy for residents and staff in care homes. This testing approach applies in England only.

Outbreak management and rapid testing for care homes with outbreaks

A new outbreak management process which includes rapid testing for care homes with outbreaks started on 13 July.

Public Health England (PHE) Health Protection Teams (HPTs) continue to be the first point of contact when an outbreak is suspected. The care home manager must contact the [local HPT](#) immediately when a care home identifies a suspected case of Coronavirus. The HPT will undertake a public health risk assessment to determine next steps. If an outbreak is suspected, the HPT will then order a batch of tests for rapid testing of the whole care home (residents and staff) using local NHS and PHE lab capacity (Pillar 1¹).

HPTs will arrange a second round of testing for residents and staff who test negative on the first round of testing or who missed testing, 4-7 days later. Those who missed the first round, and who then test negative will require a second test 4-7 days later. This retesting of individuals who tested negative is to reduce the risk of a false negative result.

Following the test on day 4-7, continue the regular weekly testing cycle for staff only, using the tests provided for regular retesting (see below) through the Whole Home Testing portal. Staff who have previously tested positive will be exempt from re-testing within a period of six weeks from their initial onset of symptoms or positive test result (if asymptomatic), unless they develop new symptoms, in which case they should be tested again (using the [testing portal](#) for people with symptoms).

¹ Pillar 1: swab testing in Public Health England (PHE) labs and NHS hospitals for those with a clinical need, and health and care workers.

Following the tests on day 4-7 and before the whole home test 28 days after the last suspected/confirmed case (see below), PHE recommend that continuing the schedule of regular asymptomatic testing of residents is not needed unless recommended otherwise by the HPT or by the DPH following a local risk assessment. This is because whole home testing is needed at the start of an outbreak and at 28 days after the last case and therefore continuing the usual schedule for testing residents is unlikely to be the most appropriate testing needed during an outbreak. In an ongoing outbreak, discuss with your Health Protection Team what testing of residents is needed during this time. During this period, residents who develop new symptoms should be tested immediately (using Pillar 1 – contact your local HPT) and should follow the existing self-isolation guidance.

All staff and residents should then be retested again 28 days after the last resident or staff had a positive test result or showed coronavirus-like symptoms. Use tests provided through the Whole Home Testing portal for this. As detailed above, staff or residents who have previously tested positive will be exempt from re-testing within a period of six weeks from their initial onset of symptoms or test result (if asymptomatic). Therefore, depending on when the individual developed symptoms/tested positive, they may be excluded from this whole home test at 28 days after the last case.

If a new case or cases are detected after this 28-day recovery period has been achieved, then this is a new outbreak and the care home manager should notify the HPT.

Any care home workers with symptoms should be self-isolating and can access testing via the [self-referral portal](#).

Retesting in care homes without outbreaks

From the 6 July we started rolling out regular retesting through the care home portal (Pillar 2²) for care homes who do not have an outbreak. Where there is no outbreak, care homes should test staff weekly and residents every 28 days.

Retesting is initially being rolled out to care homes who primarily care for people who are over 65s and those with dementia³, in order to reach those care homes that first received whole home testing and based on SAGE and PHE advice. We will then extend the retesting programme to the remaining CQC registered adult care homes (for those aged under 65). These care homes will be able to register on the portal from 31st August. This does not include supported living and extra care settings – as detailed in our adult social care testing strategy, we have written to Directors of Public Health to ask them to identify supported living and extra care settings which meet certain risk-based criteria. We will use this information to plan the roll out to this part of the sector.

² Pillar 2: swab testing for the wider population, as set out in government guidance. This includes routine care home testing through the care home portal.

³ The programme uses LaingBuisson primary client type data to determine which care homes primarily care for people who are over 65s and those with dementia.

Why are we testing everyone in care homes?

Testing for all care homes will help to protect residents and staff and is an important part of the national effort to tackle coronavirus (Covid-19). Even where residents and staff have no symptoms it is still important to test regularly. Whole care home repeat testing is about stopping the spread of the virus rather than waiting until it is too late and having to deal with an outbreak. It's about keeping staff and residents safe.

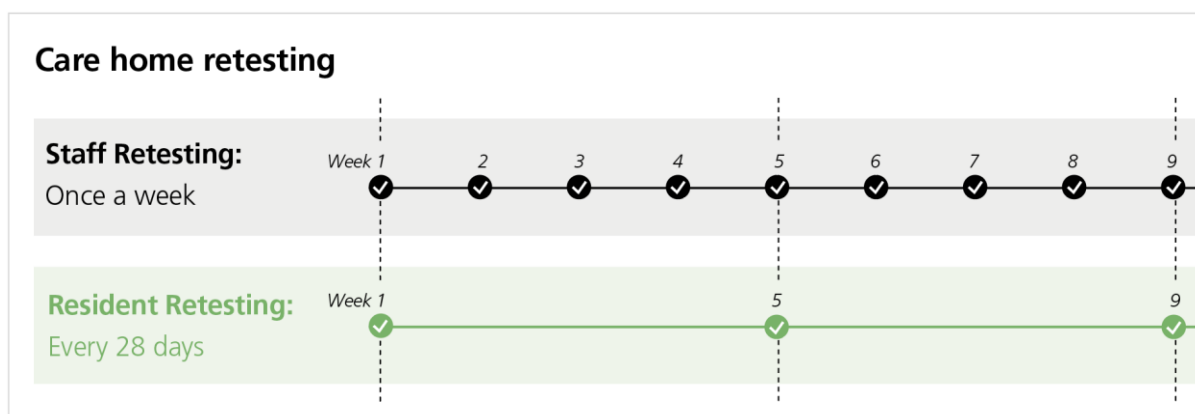
It is particularly important to test staff regularly as they move in and out of care homes and so they are more likely to catch the virus from outside and potentially bring the virus into the care home.

How do I apply to receive test kits to carry out repeat testing?

Care homes should register for retesting here <https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-care-home>, as soon as possible. Note even if you previously registered for whole home testing when it was first made available, you will need to re-register on the portal in order to receive regular retesting.

When should I test residents, and when should I test staff?

Care homes should carry out whole home testing (staff and residents) in the same week that they receive their tests. In weeks 2, 3 and 4 only staff should be tested. We will distribute enough kits to the care home for one month of testing (4x staff population and 1x resident population) each time an order is placed. Care homes, when registering, should continue to provide **actual staff and resident numbers**. The programme will automatically work out how many tests this means should be provided. This is set out below.



When will I receive test kits to carry out retesting?

We are rolling out retesting to all care homes that primarily care for the over 65s and those with dementia over the coming weeks. We will notify you by email to inform you when your test kits will be delivered. When you register on the portal you will receive an email confirmation that your registration has been received. Closer to the time you will then receive confirmation of which day of that week your tests will arrive.

On what days should I carry out testing?

Testing residents of care homes every 28 days and staff every week means increasing the numbers of tests our labs need to process every week. In the first round of testing, we found that most care homes did their testing at the beginning of the week and only a very small number of care homes did their testing at the weekend which limited the total number of tests we can do because the lab has to be able to cope with the huge numbers of tests we get over very few days.

In order to make full use of the available lab capacity, we **strongly encourage care homes to carry out their testing throughout the week, including weekends (our couriers can be booked 7 days a week)**. This will enable us to increase the amount of testing we can do.

Who should be tested using this testing provision?

Testing should be done for the whole home. Even where residents and staff are not symptomatic. Whole care home testing is about prevention rather than waiting until it is too late and having to deal with an outbreak.

Residents - All residents should be tested, even those who have previously tested positive for Covid-19. Residents who develop new symptoms should be tested immediately by contacting the HPT (this applies even if there is a current outbreak in the care home) and should follow the existing self-isolation guidance. Residents who previously tested positive should not be retested again until six weeks after their first onset of symptoms or six weeks after their positive test result (if asymptomatic). They can be retested after six weeks or should be tested immediately if they develop an onset of new symptoms.

Staff - All care home staff (including volunteers and agency workers) without symptoms should be tested, even those who have previously tested positive for Covid-19. Staff who have previously tested positive will be exempt from re-testing within a period of 6 weeks from their initial onset of symptoms or test result (if asymptomatic) unless they develop new symptoms, in which case they should be tested again (using the [testing portal](#) for people with symptoms). After six weeks, they should continue to be tested weekly.

Staff with symptoms should NOT be tested in the care home. Staff with symptoms should instead be referred for testing at a regional / local test centre or in their own home. Please visit <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test> to arrange a test.

Further information is available in the following guidance [COVID-19: management of staff and exposed patients or residents in health and social care settings](#). This includes guidance for staff who are symptomatic, the criteria for staff returning to work and guidance regarding being a “contact” of a confirmed case. For example staff could become a “contact” of a confirmed case – and therefore need to isolate – due to contact with a co-worker (when not wearing PPE) who has tested positive, though being traced as a contact of someone in the community who has tested positive or following a risk assessment regarding potential exposure at work (for example a breach of PPE when in close contact with a confirmed or suspected case). The guidance also provides further detail regarding this risk assessment process and when this is needed.

How to carry out testing on staff and residents?

For residents – [Detailed instructions](#) on administering tests to residents is available to care homes. Everyone who will be involved in administering tests should watch this [instruction video](#). We recognise that some care home staff will not feel comfortable conducting swabbing. Training and advice can be sought via the care home's named clinical lead, the local CCG Director of Nursing, in the same way that PPE training has been provided or from the local Director of Public Health.

For staff - The test kits are self-administered meaning staff can perform the tests on themselves. Test kits come with detailed instructions on how to use them. You can also refer to this helpful video on [self-administering swabs](#).

We are also developing an information sheet for staff which will be shared shortly.

Will the test kits come with personal protective equipment (PPE)?

No. The testing offer provides test kits only. Care homes are asked to follow the [current guidance](#) from Public Health England on how to work safely in care homes and this video on [putting on and removing PPE](#).

Tests should not be conducted without the correct PPE.

What support is available to care homes who are carrying out testing

To support care home planning to carry out whole care home retesting, we host regular webinars on the whole home testing process. We strongly recommend them for care homes that carry out testing so that they can understand the process and what they need to do. Care Homes can register to access these webinars here:

<https://event.on24.com/wcc/r/2375949/724EF6345473A192F6B9C19334699A29/1077953>.

How will care homes get the results from Pillar 2 Testing?

Results will be communicated as soon as possible. As far as possible, residents should be offered the choice to receive the results directly (rather than via the registered manager on their behalf). Registered managers may choose to obtain written consent for results to be sent to them on the resident's behalf.

Similarly, members of staff should register to receive their own test results, or with their written consent they can be sent to the care home directly via the care home manager.

The test results will also be fed back to PHE to inform any follow up actions required, and to build up our understanding of the prevalence of the virus in care homes across England.

Who should care homes contact for further support and guidance?

If you have questions about your test kit registration, you can contact the Coronavirus Testing Call Centre on 0300 303 2713. It is open from 07:00 to 23:00 every day.

Further advice

For more information and guidance on whole home testing visit: www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested#care-home

Read the [PHE guidance on self-isolation and test results](#). This guidance will continue to be updated regularly so check back every retest cycle.

How the regular testing process works

	What to expect:	What to do :
Initial Order	You will receive an email from care.home.portal.for.coronavirus.test.kits@notifications.service.gov.uk confirming your successful order of tests.	<p>Start planning in advance so that you are ready to begin testing when the test kits are delivered to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the instructions and watch the instruction video(s) • Prepare a workflow and allocated work stations for testing • Ensure you have enough of the appropriate PPE
<p>There will be a delay between placing your order and confirming your delivery as we prioritise care home orders. Use the time to prepare your care home for testing.</p>		
Delivery Confirmation	You will receive a second email confirming the test kits are scheduled for delivery. Take this time to start preparing.	<p>Make sure you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the testing plan to all staff and residents • You should obtain consent to conduct the test from the resident in line with your usual policies and procedures. • Obtain agreement from staff to be tested, and schedule testing of staff taking into account shift patterns
Receive test kits	<p>You will receive your delivery of test kits via courier after 10am.</p> <p>Ensure that all test kits are stored safely at an ambient temperature. Do not refrigerate or leave in direct sunlight.</p>	<p>Start preparing for testing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-familiarise yourself and staff with the test instructions to prepare, collect and package the sample for each person being tested • Prepare your test record templates and workstations for an easy testing and registration workflow • Spend time preparing residents and explaining the procedure to them
Before testing	Book a courier collection at least a day before testing (by no later than 7pm)	<p>You can book all your courier collections at once or you can book ad hoc courier collections as and when you plan to test.</p> <p>Make sure that you have a confirmed courier collection for the day that you are due to start testing.</p>
Testing days	<p>Testing days, on day(s) of your choice:</p> <p>Conduct your tests between 6am - 3pm. Stop testing at 3pm to allow time for packaging before courier collection.</p> <p>Courier collection will take place between 4pm and 10pm on each day you have a booked collection.</p>	<p>For EACH day of testing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to prepare yourself, your space, your residents and staff • Follow the test instructions to prepare, collect and package the sample for each resident or staff member between 6am and 3pm • Note the barcode number and time of each test against the name of the person tested • Register the completed test online as close as possible to the time of the swab • Courier collects completed test samples between 4pm and 10pm
Results	You will receive the test results by email within 72 hours of test kits arriving at the laboratory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify, as appropriate, the resident, GP and family of the test result • Take appropriate actions if the test result is positive or inconclusive