

Dear Providers,

We are writing to thank you for your continued support working with some of the most vulnerable people in Lancashire during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

This letter gives an update on a number of key areas, including;

- testing arrangements;
- support to undertake swabbing;
- guidance for visitors to care homes;
- updated admissions policy and
- the 'Think NHS 111 First' programme.

As well as reading this letter and associated guidance, it is important that you respond quickly and effectively to what can be a fast-evolving situation in the light of developments in parts of Lancashire over the past fortnight.

## **Testing**

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) announced on 3 July 2020 that repeat Covid-19 testing was going to be offered to care homes within an identified criteria (i.e. homes for older people and people with dementia) as part of the national whole home testing programme. They also announced that repeat testing was planned to be extended to include all care homes for working age adults during August.

On 4 August, the DHSC emailed all care homes to update them regarding the repeat testing programme and to explain that as a result of numerous factors, including unexpected delays and the withdrawal of the Randox testing kits, they have unfortunately not been able to reach all identified homes as quickly as anticipated. Although the DHSC is working to increase their supply, they have had to revise their previously advised timelines for rolling out regular testing in care homes, but will deliver kits sooner if able to do so.

The DHSC now plans to reach all care homes for older people and people with dementia by the 7 September 2020. If homes have already started regular testing, please be aware that there may be a wait for the second month's order to be fulfilled until the DHSC has reached all care homes within this cohort. All other adult care homes will be able to start to place orders for test kits from the 31 August 2020.

Please see the attached update from the Department of Health and Social care for more information.

We will aim to keep providers informed as much as possible on developments in this government-led situation and this information is the latest update at the time of writing, but please be aware that there may be further changes and updates to the national testing programme.

We acknowledge the frustrations that many care home providers are experiencing in relation to the repeat whole home testing process and thank you for your continued patience.

Please be reminded that any symptomatic person is still able to get an individual test and care homes with suspected positive cases will be able to access whole home testing via their local Public Health England Health Protection Team in instances of suspected cases (Tel: 0344 225 0562).

If you have any testing-related queries, then please contact:

[COVID19-TESTING@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:COVID19-TESTING@lancashire.gov.uk) (LCC)

[infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk) (for LCC and Blackburn with Darwen) or

[publichealth@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:publichealth@blackpool.gov.uk) (Blackpool)

We will continue to support the care sector in any way we can, including keeping in regular contact with care providers to ensure they have all the support they need.

### **Swabbing**

If you need help with undertaking swabbing in care homes, then there is support available via Virgin Care.

There is also training available to support homes to undertake their own testing; it is important that swabs are taken correctly, as there are still a high number of false negative tests caused by poor swabbing.

For more information about the support and training available, please contact:

[Gregory.Joynson@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:Gregory.Joynson@lancashire.gov.uk)

### **Guidance on visiting arrangements in care homes**

On 22 July, the government published guidance regarding an update to policies for visiting arrangements for care homes. It is acknowledged that restrictions on visits during lockdown has been difficult for many residents and families and that allowing visits will have obvious wellbeing benefits, however, there are distinct challenges within care homes to safeguard residents and staff from the risk of infection and outbreak within the home. The guidance was then updated on 31 July.

The guidance states that policies for visiting arrangements and decisions should be based on a dynamic risk assessment and minimise risk wherever possible. Risk assessments should be kept up to date in light of government guidance.

The guidance sets out:

1. the principles of a local approach and dynamic risk assessment;
2. advice for providers when establishing their visiting policy;
3. advice for providers when taking visiting decisions for particular residents or groups of residents;
4. infection-control precautions;
5. communicating with family and others about the visiting policy and visiting decisions.

As always, we ask providers to maintain vigilance in relation to visitors, the correct use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), social distancing and hand hygiene and that visiting professionals follow correct infection prevention control behaviours. You may also want to communicate the need for vigilance and measures such as hand hygiene and social distancing to residents/families and friends via a newsletter or something similar. LCC is currently working on developing some easy-read,

accessible guidelines to support homes in their communications with families and loved ones and we will share this with you as soon as possible.

We know that some homes are reluctant or refusing to allow visiting professionals in due to fear and anxiety regarding the risk of infection, and whilst we agree that footfall within the home should be limited, it is important to safely allow professionals into the home, e.g. for medical checks and also for safeguarding purposes. To limit risk, where visits do go ahead, this should be limited to a single constant visitor, per resident, wherever possible, in order to limit the overall numbers of visitors to the care home and the consequent risk of infection. We also appreciate some care homes may choose not to accept visitors despite the change in guidance and would like more reassurance around testing.

### **New Restrictions from 31 July 2020 affecting North West England**

On some occasions, because of a spike in infection in a particular community or geographical area, local arrangements may be directed by the Director of Public Health for that local authority area. This is likely to include restrictions of visitors to care homes in that area.

You will be aware that with effect from 31 July, new restrictions were implemented in parts of the North West and a letter went out to care homes on this date from the Lancashire Resilience Forum to advise providers of the local measures to be implemented. The restrictions mean that there are currently additional infection control and protections measure in place in the following areas/districts in Lancashire:

- Blackburn with Darwen

East Lancashire:

- Burnley
- Pendle
- Rossendale
- Hyndburn

From 31 July, care homes in these affected areas **should not** facilitate visits to residents from friends or family in care homes, other than in exceptional circumstances (care homes should restrict visits to these circumstances).

For further information on the local restrictions in these areas, please refer to the following link: [North West of England local restrictions: what you can and cannot do \(link\)](#)

Please be aware that Blackpool care homes and Lancashire care homes (excluding those in the identified areas of East Lancashire as above) can continue to follow the government's guidance re: visiting care homes with effect from 1 August (i.e. the guidance first published on 22<sup>nd</sup> July and then updated on 31 July). Please refer to the following link for further information: [Update on policies for visiting arrangements in care homes during Coronavirus](#)

This is the current position in Lancashire at the time of writing, however, as you will be aware, this is an ever-evolving situation and as such, other local areas may become hotspots (e.g. there has been a recent spike in cases in Preston) and so may be subject to restrictions and revised guidelines as detailed above. Please can all care providers be prepared, as restrictions can be announced and

implemented quickly, and so you should aim to be in a position to respond promptly and effectively to restrict visitors if required to do so by the Director of Public Health.

### **Updated Admissions Policy**

The Lancashire Resilience Forum has agreed a revised Care Settings Admissions Policy Statement (this is revised from the 24 June version which has previously been shared with providers). The aim of the statement is to support and enable safe admissions into residential care and support living settings during the pandemic and will be kept under review and updated as required. The policy statement updates include the direction from the LRF to close outbreaks following day 28 and not upon the receipt of the signed deep clean checklist. Please still send the End of Outbreak Cleaning Checklist back to: [infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk) Please see the attached admissions statement.

### **'Think NHS 111 First' programme**

NHS 111 First is a new national programme which builds on the existing Integrated Urgent Care Service accessed through NHS 111. It will encourage the use of NHS 111 online and phone service to access a range of urgent care services including direct booking into Emergency Departments. Alongside this, processes will be developed to appropriately stream patients who present unannounced to the right service.

NHS 111 First will ensure that patients can access the clinical service they need, first time, both in and outside of hospital, with the convenience of a booked appointment or time slot. Importantly, it will help to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 between patients and to staff by reducing crowding in waiting areas across services.

There will be a phased approach to the roll-out process of NHS 111 First in the North West, with Blackpool identified as one of the two 'first mover' sites, along with Warrington, who will adopt the approach by the end of August. We will share more information on this once available.

We hope that you have found this update useful and we would like to thank you once again for your ongoing commitment and support to the people of Lancashire during this challenging time.