

Dr Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer/Medical Director, NHS Wales
Prif Swyddog Meddygol/Cyfarwyddwr Meddygol, GIG Cymru



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Albert Heaney
Chief Social Care Officer for Wales
Prif Swyddog Gofal Cymdeithasol Cymru

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Dear Colleagues,

Summary of recent changes to TTP policies.

You will be aware that the emergence of the Omicron variant has resulted in a number of changes to Welsh Government policy, advice and regulations with regard to testing, self-isolation and actions that staff should take in response to confirmed cases.

I wanted to take this opportunity to confirm the changes that have been made and provide some clarity around some common queries.

Changes to the requirement of follow up PCR tests

From 6 January 2022 those without symptoms who test positive from an LFT will no longer be advised to take a follow up PCR test.

In times of higher prevalence of the Covid 19 virus, the reliability of both PCRs and LFDs in detecting positive cases is similar but the LFD has the advantage of speed with almost immediate results compared to PCRs that require lab processing. This position will be kept under review and in the context of changing prevalence.

It is still vitally important that those with the main symptoms of COVID continue to book PCR tests and not just rely on taking an LFT.

In addition to the change above, the advice for all **unvaccinated contacts** has changed and they are now advised during the 10 day self-isolation period to take LFTs on day 2 & 8 instead of a PCR test. These unvaccinated individuals must remain in isolation until day 11 regardless of the LFT result on day 2 & 8.

[Written Statement: Prioritising PCR Testing \(5 January 2022\) | GOV.WALES](#)

Changes to self-isolation period for confirmed cases

We are aware that England have recently announced a change to their self isolation periods reducing it further from 7 to 5 days. Welsh Ministers are currently considering the policy position for Wales. However the current position is that as from 31 December 2021 changes were made to the regulations and [guidance](#) in Wales for positive cases. Those who test positive should now isolate for **7 days** and should take LFTs on day 6 & 7 of their isolation. If either of these tests is positive our advice for Health and Social Care staff is to continue daily LFT testing until two consecutive negative results 24 hours

apart. Staff can return to work 24 hours after the second negative LFT and therefore no sooner than day 8.

The likelihood of a positive LFT in the absence of symptoms after 10 days is very low. However, if a staff member has a positive LFT result on the 10th day they should resume the testing regime of testing before attending work/ going on shift from day 11. In this instance staff members should not return to work until a single negative LFT result is received.

Those staff who report positive LFTs after day 8 will result in a new case on the contact tracing system and they will therefore need to inform the contact tracing team the LFT positive is due to testing associated with an existing case.

Residents who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate and Welsh Government advice on [self-isolation](#) should be followed.

Staff who are confirmed contacts of someone with COVID-19

Changes made on 21 December 2021 resulted in fully vaccinated members of the general public no longer being required to self-isolate if they are a contact of someone who tested positive.

Health and Social Care staff should continue to [follow this guidance](#) if they have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

In summary:

- Unvaccinated staff must self-isolate for 10 days and are advised to take a LFT on day 2 and 8 of their self-isolation period.
- Fully vaccinated staff who are not in close contact with service users may return to work and should take lateral flows each morning for 7 days.
- Fully vaccinated staff who are in close contact with service users will need to contact their manager and will be required to have a negative PCR result before returning to work. These staff should also continue to use LFTs before coming into work.
- Fully vaccinated staff who work in close contact with service users who are known to be immunosuppressed and/or [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) will not continue to work with these service users. Staff should be redeployed to work with service users who are not immunosuppressed and/or clinically extremely vulnerable. They will be asked to take the necessary tests or asked not to attend work.

Regular Asymptomatic Lateral Flow Testing

From the 17 December 2021 our guidance for all public-facing health and social care staff changed from twice weekly LFT testing to a recommendation that LFTs should be taken each day staff attend a health or social care setting for work. It is vitally important that staff report all of their LFD tests using the government portal, regardless of the result, so that we can gain assurance that testing is happening at expected levels.

Removal of additional testing for staff returning from overseas

It remains our position that overseas travel should be avoided unless completely necessary. However in light of recent changes to the rules around returning from overseas travel I can confirm that we no longer advise any additional testing requirements for health and social care staff above that of the general public (vaccinated staff do not need to isolate just return to your LFD testing before going on shift, unvaccinated staff must isolate for 10 days and take a PCR test on days 2 and 8)

[Travel to Wales: COVID-19 testing and isolation | GOV.WALES](#)

Testing within 90 days of a positive test.

Our longstanding policy has been that someone who has previously tested positive via PCR should not take another PCR test for 90 days unless they develop new core symptoms of COVID-19 or are required to do so under international travel requirements.

LFTs can, and should, be used regardless of previous infection for regular testing including testing before work, testing as part of a positive case isolation period and testing in line with the policy for staff who are contacts.

This is particularly important as immunity from previous infection is not a strong defence against Omicron and reinfections are increasingly common.

In light of the above changes we are updating the previously published [flow charts](#) which can help social care providers and staff navigate the various policy positions and decision making in relation to testing.

LFT availability

You will be aware that the Welsh Government has agreed a short term mutual aid loan of LFTs to England that will be paid back in full week commencing 17 January. I want to assure you that Wales has its own allocated stock of LFTs and a proportion of that stock is ring-fenced to support the testing policies put in place to support health and social care staff testing. Any policy change in Wales is first considered and planned within our total allocation to ensure the policy can be successfully delivered.

Due to increases in demand of LFTs in response to rising cases and changes in UK Government and Welsh Government policies there have been periods where LFTs have been harder to access in the community. This was due to maximising the delivery capacity of the community channels and not a shortage of LFTs stock for Wales.

Local Authorities, Health Boards, Trusts and Social Care Settings have a well-established online ordering system which allows deliveries directly to settings. At times when there are logistic and distribution issues there are back up procedures in place to ensure tests can still be distributed in case of emergency from shared services stores.

Registering settings for direct delivery

By now most Health and Social Care settings across Wales will be registered on the online portal through which LFTs can be ordered and delivered directly to the setting. If any health setting has not yet done this they can do so by contacting Covid19.HealthTesting@gov.wales

Social care settings should contact Covid19.SocialCareTesting@gov.wales

Delivery issues and queries

Any setting that has any delivery issues or logistical concerns after ordering on the portal should contact 119.

The COVID-19 Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement Scheme

This scheme was introduced in November 2020 to provide financial support for social care workers who need to self-isolate or stay off work in line with current guidance on [Self-isolation](#) and [COVID-19 contacts: guidance for health and social care staff](#). The scheme provides funding for employers to pay workers at full pay where they do not receive occupational sick pay. The funding removes the financial disadvantage to social care workers when they need to stay off work due to the current guidance, in order to reduce the risk of transmission.

We have reviewed the wording of the scheme guidance to reflect the changes in the self-isolation guidance and requirements for social care workers who are identified as close contacts of Covid positive cases. It is important that you continue to consult the most recent guidance when making claims from the Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement Scheme. The scheme supports the employee to stay off work for the minimum period allowed by the current guidance.

[COVID-19 statutory sick pay enhancement scheme | GOV.WALES](#)

Please ensure your staff are aware of this scheme. I continue to be grateful to our colleagues in local authorities who administer the scheme on behalf of Welsh Ministers.

Yours sincerely



DR FRANK ATHERTON
Chief Medical Officer/Medical Director, NHS Wales
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