

Public Health Link

From the Chief Medical Officer for Wales

Distribution:	As Appendix 1
From:	Dr Frank Atherton, Chief Medical Officer
Date:	18 March 2020
Reference:	CEM/CMO/2020/8
Category:	Immediate (cascade within 6 hours)
Title:	Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Key changes to testing criteria
What is this about:	This alert provides advice on changes to testing criteria, including testing of Health Care Workers
Why has it been sent:	This alert updates the advice sent on 13 March 2020

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advice for the NHS in Wales

On 13 March I wrote to you confirming the UK had moved from the containment phase to the **delay** phase of our response to COVID-19. Following this move, individuals displaying symptoms of a new onset continuous cough and/or high temperature are being asked to self-isolate at home for 7 days and testing of these individuals is not routinely recommended. In addition, when any member of a household is symptomatic, the other members of the household are being advised to stay at home for 14 days.

For individuals who have already had their swabs taken under the previous case definition the NHS will complete the test to ensure that they receive the results as that may still change our advice to them.

Criteria for testing

Testing is now recommended for individuals requiring admission to hospital (a hospital practitioner has decided that admission to hospital is required with an expectation that the patient will need to stay at least one night) **and**

- have either clinical or radiological evidence of pneumonia
- or
- acute respiratory distress syndrome
- or
- influenza like illness (fever $\geq 37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ and at least one of the following respiratory symptoms, which must be of acute onset: persistent cough (with or without sputum), hoarseness, nasal discharge or congestion, shortness of breath, sore throat, wheezing, sneezing)

Interim criteria for testing key frontline Healthcare Workers (HCWs)

Providing a negative test result to key frontline HCWs will allow them to return to work much sooner than the 7/14 day self-isolation periods which have been specified. Therefore, based on careful risk assessment, HCWs involved in frontline patient facing clinical care working in the following areas will be considered for testing:

- a. Acute Medical Assessment Units
- b. Emergency Departments
- c. Critical Care Units/Intensive Care Units
- d. Primary Care
- e. EMS frontline NHS Ambulance staff

Benefits of testing key frontline HCWs

Although a negative test does not rule out infection with COVID-19, it provides a basis for early return of HCWs from self-isolation to support the running of the service. HCWs who test positive and recover from the infection can be redeployed to care for COVID-19 patients.

Priority of testing during periods of significant demand

- **Group 1 (test first)** patient requiring critical care for the management of pneumonia, ARDS or influenza like illness (ILI), or an alternative indication of severe illness has been provided, for example severe pneumonia or ARDS.
- **Group 2** all other patients requiring admission to hospital for management of pneumonia, ARDS or ILI.
- **Group 3** HCWs meeting the criteria listed above.
- **Group 4** clusters of disease in residential or care settings, for example long term care facilities and prisons.
- **Group 5** where the situation requires, testing can be requested by the Medical Director of the organisation in consultation with Public Health Wales.

PHW, working with health boards, will develop a protocol to help facilitate HCW testing.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer

To: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership to forward to:

All General Practitioners - please ensure this message is seen by all practice nurses and non-principals working in your practice and retain a copy in your 'locum information pack'.

All Community Pharmacists

Dentists

Optometrists

Deputising services

HB Chief Pharmacists

HB Prescribing Advisers

Independent/Private clinics and Hospitals and Hospices throughout Wales

To: Health Boards and NHS Trusts:

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Medical Directors

Nurse Directors

Directors of Public Health

Directors of Workforce and Organisational Development

Directors of Therapies and Health Sciences

Hospital Principals and Chief Pharmacists

Onward distribution to:

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Infectious Disease Departments

Acute medical units

Microbiologists

To: Public Health Wales:

Chief Executive

Director of Public Health Services

Consultants in Communicable Disease Control

Microbiologists

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