

Ein cyf/Our ref JM/00467/20

Heléna Herklots  
Older People's Commissioner for Wales Commissioner  
**REDACTED (SECTION 40)**

13 May 2020

Dear Heléna

Thank you for your email of 1 May forwarding the email you received from the MHA Charity about some of the problems they have experienced in their care homes and calling for routine testing for Covid 19. I understand that the MHA wrote a similar email to the Chief Medical Officer and he will be responding.

We are prioritising our resources to focus on protecting the most vulnerable people in our community, this includes care home residents. I attach a link to the guidance which was updated on 7 May and answers to testing questions we have published explaining how we targeting our resources to areas of greatest need to reduce harm.

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-process>  
<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-your-questions>.

The guidance explains the testing process in Wales, which is different to the UK Government, therefore the link to the portal which the MHRA provided does not cover Wales.

At the moment, the evidence does not support blanket testing – it points to testing people who have symptoms and isolating them until the test results come back. In the case of a care home, where a number of older people are living closely together, many of whom will have underlying health conditions, if the results of the tests are positive, we should assume – and take actions – as if everyone in the home has tested positive.

As April has progressed, we have moved to a position where we have been testing all care home staff and residents when there are symptomatic individuals. We have also tested anybody who is discharged from hospital to a care home, admitted to a care home or transferred from one home to another. We are providing alternative step down or step up care to support individuals who have tested positive to support their recovery, where there will be infection control measures in place.

We are learning more about coronavirus every day – the evidence is constantly changing and emerging and we keep it under constant review.

The latest evidence now shows that we should extend testing in care homes to manage outbreaks. We should test all staff and residents in those care homes when an outbreak of coronavirus is identified. The evidence also suggests there is a greater prevalence of coronavirus in the larger care homes, where there are more people living and working, and we will focus our support here also.

On 2 May 2020, the Minister for Health and Social Services announced that a new three-stage testing and rapid response package is being introduced to help protect care home residents and staff. This does not rely on testing alone:

- Making it easier to get a test done – The eight new mobile testing units, which will be available from May 3, and home testing kits, when they become available, will be focused towards care homes to ensure testing is easily available.
- Targeted testing on outbreak hot spots – We will target testing and deploy the mobile units to test all residents in care homes, in cases where an outbreak occurs (and potentially in neighbouring care homes) and repeat testing the following week.
  - o Testing will also be available in the largest care homes (those with more than 50 beds) which are at greater risk of experiencing an outbreak because of their size.
- Environmental and hygiene support – we will combine testing people with environmental support when hotspots are identified.
  - o Increased cleaning, providing hand sanitiser and increased infection control measures will accompany the testing regime. Updated guidance to support these environmental measures will be provided to the sector.

As the Covid-19 emergency progresses we are keeping all of our actions under review and are responding to improve support as the evidence suggests is necessary. I of course understand that care providers will rightly be concerned about the ongoing impact of the virus in the community and I hope my reply to you setting out our continuing efforts to expand testing will be of assistance in this regard.

Yours sincerely

**Julie Morgan AS/MS**

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services