Chief Medical Officer for Scotland
Professor Sir Gregor Smith

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Dear Colleagues

Advance notice of changes to Scottish Government's COVID-19 testing guidance

We are writing to inform you of changes to Scottish Government's COVID-19 testing guidance. This guidance affects health, social care and prison settings.

Following a clinical review, the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, and the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport have agreed to pause all Scottish Government COVID-19 routine testing guidance in health, social care and prison settings. An exception to this pause is for individuals in hospital, prior to being discharged to a care home or a hospice: this routine testing will remain.

The outcome of this clinical review recognises that Scotland continues to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and has entered a calmer phase of the pandemic. Now is the right time to change testing guidance. This is due to the success of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, reduced severity of illness and hospitalisations, and availability of treatments for COVID-19. This follows advice from Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection (ARHAI) Scotland, Public Health Scotland, and Scottish Government Professional Clinical Advisors in Infection Prevention and Control.

Testing protocol for COVID-19 will revert to testing as appropriate to support clinical diagnosis and for outbreak management as per the National Infection Prevention and Control Manual, or on advice from local Infection Prevention and Control Teams or local Health Protection Teams. Testing for those who are eligible for COVID-19 treatments will also continue to be available. Routine testing for COVID-19 pre-discharge from hospital to a care home or hospice will be retained to provide additional reassurance for these settings. This is in line with the current position in England, and will be kept under close review.

The testing that should continue under Scottish Government guidance is in **Annex A.**

From the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland and Chief Nursing Officer
Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Professor Alex McMahon

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9 August 2023

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SGHD/CMO(2023)12

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Addresses
NHS Scotland Chairs
NHS Scotland Chief Executives
Chief Officers Health and Social Care Partnerships
Chief Social Work Officers
Local Authorities
HR Directors
Medical Directors
Nurse Directors
Primary Care Leads
Directors of Pharmacy
Directors of Public Health
Directors of Dentistry
Health Protection Teams
Optometric Advisors
Infection Control Managers
Infection Control Doctors
Infection Control Nurses
NHS Occupational Health Leads
Scottish Microbiology and Virology Network
Adult Social Care Providers
Care Inspectorate
National Prison Care Network
Chief Executive, Scottish Prison Services

Further Enquiries:

Scottish Government Directorate for Chief Nursing Officer
Email: cno@gov.scot

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As a result of these changes, the 'Managing health and social care staff with symptoms of a respiratory infection or a positive COVID-19 test' guidance (Annex B within this link) has also been paused. While testing is paused, staff who have symptoms of a respiratory infection should follow the NHS Inform advice. Further information on what staff should do as a result of these changes can be found in **Annex B.**

Timing of the pause

We committed to provide a lead in time for implementation of any new testing policy change. Therefore these changes should take effect no later than 30 August 2023.

Further information

The Scottish Government healthcare worker testing and social care and community based testing webpages will be updated on 30 August 2023.

The National Infection Prevention and Control Manual, and associated COVID-19 resources, including Appendix 19 and the Hospital Testing Table will be reviewed and archived to reflect the changes on 28 August 2023. The Latest News section within the NIPCM will contain further information relating to key content changes.

Full social care guidance, available here COVID-19 - information and guidance for social, community, and residential care settings and health protection teams guidance, available here COVID-19 - guidance for health protection teams (HPTs) will be updated by 30 August 2023.

The PHS COVID-19 guidance for prison settings and the Scottish Prison Services guidance SPS COVID-19 Transition Plan will be updated in accordance with this letter.

Further details on managing health and social care staff with symptoms of a respiratory infection can be found in Annex B.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Smith   *Alex McMahon*

Professor Sir Gregor Smith   Professor Alex McMahon
Chief Medical Officer for Scotland   **Chief Nursing Officer**

ANNEX A - REMAINING SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT COVID-19 TESTING GUIDANCE IN HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND PRISON SETTINGS

Routine COVID-19 testing that should continue in health, social care and prison settings during the pause

Setting	Situation	Type of test
NHS / Adult Social Care	Discharge from hospital to care homes/hospices	LFD

Testing protocol for COVID-19 will revert to testing as appropriate to support clinical diagnosis and for outbreak management as per the National Infection Prevention and Control Manual, or on advice from local Infection Prevention and Control Teams or local Health Protection Teams. Testing for those who are eligible for COVID-19 treatments will also continue to be available.

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ANNEX B – MANAGING HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE STAFF WITH SYMPTOMS OF A RESPIRATORY INFECTION, OR A POSITIVE COVID-19 TEST

The pause to routine testing also means pausing the 'Managing Health and Social Care Staff with Symptoms of a Respiratory Infection, or a Positive COVID-19 test' guidance. Staff should now follow the NHS Inform advice if they have respiratory symptoms. The guidance can be found here: https://www.nhsinform.scot/covid19.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can I prevent passing COVID-19 onto my patients/service users and family without access to symptomatic testing?

If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection such as coronavirus and have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people. Try to do this until you no longer have a high temperature (if you had one) or until you feel better as per the advice on NHS Inform.

Why has routine COVID-19 testing ended?

Following clinical advice, it is recommended that we pause routine testing. This is due to the success of the vaccination programme, reduced severity of illness and hospitalisations, and availability of treatments for COVID-19. This follows advice from Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection (ARHAI) Scotland, Public Health Scotland, and Scottish Government Professional Clinical Advisors in Infection Prevention and Control.

What do I do if I have tested positive for COVID-19 and my isolation period runs over the date when routine testing is paused?

If you have a positive coronavirus test and your isolation period runs over the date when routine testing is paused, you should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days after the day you took your test, or from the day your symptoms started (whichever was earlier). You should count the day you took the test as day 0, or the day after your positive result, as day 1. You do not need to have a negative test result to end self-isolation or return to work after the 5-day period. This follows the advice on NHS Inform.

What if I am still eligible to receive and take free tests?

Most people in Scotland no longer need to test for coronavirus. You can still access testing if you have a health condition which means you're eligible for coronavirus treatments. If this applies to you, please follow the advice on NHS Inform.

What do I do if I have symptoms of a respiratory infection?

If you have symptoms of respiratory infection, you should follow the advice outlined above as per the guidance on NHS Inform.

I still have unused tests at home, should I use these when I have symptoms?

Most people in Scotland no longer need to test for coronavirus. If you have symptoms, we recommend that you follow the NHS Inform guidance.

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I am still worried about my risk from COVID-19. What support is available from my employer (NHS staff only) to keep me safe at work?

The pausing of routine testing follows the latest clinical guidance, and standard infection prevention and control measures remain in place. Staff are expected to manage their risk in relation to COVID-19 in much the same way as any other respiratory infection. If you are still concerned about your risks to COVID-19 following the pause of testing, you should speak to your manager about a personal risk assessment. Your manager may consider a referral to Occupational Health as part of this.