

# Coronavirus COVID-19 and adult social care in Staffordshire

## Message from Dr Richard Harling, Director of Health and Care 22 May 2020



Firstly, I would like to thank you once again for the huge part the care sector is playing to help tackle the Covid-19 pandemic.

While confirmed cases of the virus are decreasing, I know that care homes and care providers are still facing significant pressures and the toll on the sector will be felt for many months.

The government's decision to roll out testing to all residents and staff in care homes is welcome. It will help care homes control the spread of infection and give us a better understanding of how the pandemic is progressing.

Unfortunately, there remain problems with the national system for testing and we have had numerous reports of delays in sending and collecting the tests, as well as providing results. We have escalated these to government on multiple occasions and await a resolution.

There has been news that all health and care workers will be offered a new antibody test which will show if they have had the virus, and we await further details of when and how this will be rolled out.

Other developments of interest include:

### **Symptoms of Covid-19 and risks in the BAME population**

New symptoms of Covid-19, a loss or change to sense of smell or taste, have been added to the list of 'main symptoms' this week, alongside a raised temperature and a new, continuous cough, as outlined on our [Covid-19 testing and infection control](#) web page. Public Health England West Midlands is also advising care homes to treat as a potential key Covid-19 symptom a new onset or worsening confusion, and a worsening shortness of breath in their residents. You can find more information about this in their presentation slide pack on the above webpage.

In the absence of formal national guidance, we are advising that the following black and Asian groups (including African, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Filipino, Chinese and Japanese communities) are managed in a

similar way to 'higher risk' population groups in relation to risk assessment and risk management in relation to Covid-19.

We have reflected this message in our updated infection control and PPE guidelines Q&A document this week, which can also be found on our [Covid-19 testing and infection control](#) web page.

### **Support for care homes**

We are finalising our care home resilience plan, which is required by government on Friday, 29 May. This will set out all the support that the council and the NHS are providing to care homes in line with the national [coronavirus \(Covid-19\) care homes support package](#).

Please also visit the key information for all Staffordshire care homes section on our [Information for care homes](#) webpage to view messages this week on local support available to care homes, including:

- **infection prevention and control support** (from visits from nurses to homes to help risk assessment and risk control, supporting testing of residents and staff to supporting homes carry out testing themselves)
- ensuring care homes know where they can **access emergency PPE** supplies and that staff are fully **competent in the donning and doffing of PPE** and receive the necessary training and support available if not)
- ensuring care homes are fully communicating their Covid-19 status, bed vacancies, staffing and PPE status on the **Capacity Tracker** and know where to get support if they need it
- ensuring as many care homes as possible are accessing all the benefits of secure email and video conferencing that the current fast track access to **NHSmail** is offering them

### **Government funding for adult social care**

Further to the announcement last week of **£600m in ringfenced government support** for care homes' infection control, allocations to each local authority will be issued on a per bed basis, including self-funder places.

It's expected that each registered care home should receive an amount per CQC registered bed, representing 75% of the funding. The remaining 25% must be used for infection control measures, with local authorities able to allocate based on need. This may involve support for home care.

Staffordshire's share is around £9.9m. We are drawing up a plan for allocation of this funding and will communicate that as soon as we can.

**Please note:** for care homes to be eligible to receive this funding they are required to update their status on the Capacity Tracker. This includes ensuring they complete the new 'yes/no' response to questions under the five focus areas by 26 May as follows:

- infection prevention and control measures
- Covid-19 testing
- PPE and clinical equipment
- workforce support
- clinical support

### **Financial sustainability**

This week I have written to update contracted Staffordshire care homes, and providers of home care, extra care and supported living services about the additional funding we are offering to support care providers. Copies of these letters are available on the dedicated page for each provider group.

### **PPE**

More than one million items of PPE items have been distributed since the start of the pandemic with just over 190,000 of those distributed in the past week. We now have a small supply of gowns and has added yellow waste bags, orange waste bags and red laundry bags to its items of PPE for emergency distribution.

Please see the accessing PPE section on our [PPE webpage](#) for further details. We have advised against the use of homemade masks in our updated infection control and PPE guidelines Q&A document this week; also available on that webpage.

### **Staff wellbeing**

This week is Mental Health Awareness week in the UK and has also seen the publication of a Local Government Association and NHS Health and Wellbeing resource pack covering coping with stress and bereavement, managing emotions, where to go for further resources or to seek support in our 'health and wellbeing of the adult social care workforce' section on our [other help for providers](#) webpage. This section will also link providers to a practical wellbeing and mental health support package, including valuable apps and links to Helplines produced by the government.

### **Recruitment into adult social care**

There are two recruitment campaigns running currently. The first is a national DHSC [care for others: make a difference](#) campaign, which aims to attract thousands more people into the social care sector. The second is a regional

West Midlands employers and Association of Directors of Adult Social Care [time to care](#) campaign, which aims to match job seekers keen to explore a number of different roles in the care sector (from care worker to maintenance and cooking for example) to available jobs in the area.

DHSC has partnered with a number of local job boards and also has its own dedicated DWP jobs board to support free jobs listings for providers detailed on its webpage to support providers to prominently advertise their jobs. Providers are encouraged to use this valuable resource and the free online rapid induction training offer available from [Skills for Care](#).

Our Care Market Development Team will be supporting both campaigns, helping job applicants to identify their experience, skills and behaviours to add value to their applications in this sector and helping them find jobs being advertised in the areas they are able to work in Staffordshire. We will update our website with further information on this in the coming days.

### **Web communications**

Our information for providers Covid-19 web pages have proved popular and useful particularly for frontline staff. Over the period between 4 April to 16 May, there have been 6060 users and 25,491 hits on our web pages. Whilst visitors are likely to navigate across more than one page at a time, the pages with the vast majority of user uptake, ranked in order of the top three, have been those on:

- PPE (2948 users)
- information for care providers (2386 users)
- staff testing (905 users)

The total hits have followed the pandemic curve, with the peak of uptake over the 18 April to 1 May period. If you have any feedback on how we can improve the user experience, please do let us know.

Please send us your success stories if you would like me to share them in future updates by sending further details to our Health and Care Engagement mailbox: [healthandcare@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:healthandcare@staffordshire.gov.uk).

Once again, thank you again for everything you are doing to support vulnerable people in Staffordshire in these challenging times.

**Dr Richard Harling, Director of Health & Care**