

To: Health Board Chief Executives
CC: Directors of Public Health
Chief Officers
Chief Executives of Local Authorities

17 April 2020

Dear Colleague

I recognise the significant work that NHS Boards have already done in response to the COVID-19. We have placed NHS Scotland on an emergency footing and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the enormous work you have already done to transform the delivery of services, including very significant pivoting of staff and repurposing of facilities. I am writing to you today with a further ask in relation to care homes.

We know that this virus is highly virulent and has the hardest impact on the most vulnerable older people in our society. Close to half of our care homes in Scotland either have active or have had active cases of COVID and I recognise and appreciate all that has been done, working with the Care Inspectorate and others to support care home residents.

Much has been done, but we need to do more. The First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport have requested that Directors of Public Health take immediate action to deliver an enhanced system of assurance around the safety and wellbeing of care home residents and staff during these extraordinary times.

Directors of Public Health are uniquely well placed to lead, plan, initiate and co-ordinate this work locally. Cognisant of significant local work already underway, I am therefore writing to ask you to mobilise immediately those directors and your health protection teams to undertake the necessary action, working with local Infection Prevention and Control Teams, the Care Inspectorate, primary care teams and others. In broad terms, I am asking Directors of Public Health to oversee the provision of local support and assurance to all care homes so that they can provide a safe setting for their residents and staff throughout the Covid 19 incident.

Exactly what will be involved in this work and how it will be delivered will vary between NHS Boards. However, in all cases it will need to involve early substantial contact between DsPH and their teams and every care home in their area. The principal purpose of such contact will be to provide multi-disciplinary support and assurance to enable each home to follow in practice the range of national guidelines on Covid 19. As a minimum, this work must cover an assessment in respect of each home of:

- 1 knowledge and implementation of **infection prevention and control measures** (NHS guidance 1234).
- 2 knowledge and observance of **social distancing** measures, both for staff and residents.
- 3 **staffing** levels at all times and for all functions
- 4 the availability and quality of **training** for all staff in particular on infection control and the safe use of PPE (NHS guidance 5678).
- 5 the effective use of **testing**.

In taking this work forward, you should seek both to respond effectively to reported cases of covid-19 and to take preventative action to shield those homes where there have been no such cases.

DsPH should report on a weekly basis providing an update on the progress of the assessment outlined above for the care homes within your geographical boundary along with any good practice to be shared. We shall provide you with more details shortly, including a sample template. All such reports should also be sent to the relevant Chief Officers and Public Health Scotland. We in turn will be providing the First Minister with weekly updates of progress

This work will involve considerable joint working between teams and disciplines. Whilst I am tasking DsPH with particular responsibilities, there will be important roles for other teams, such as nursing and other staff including GPs. It will also be very important to collaborate closely with other local partners, in particular Chief Officers and care inspectorate (CI) teams. You will want to consider how to make best use of the many and varied assets at your disposal and you should not limit your ambitions by lack of access to clinical or other assets.

I am conscious that this emergency is requiring many of us to act in new ways and circumstances. With that in mind, I am anxious to ensure there continues to be as much support as possible for those delivering locally.

Health Boards and HSCPs, in collaboration with Local Government, have already drawn up mobilisation plans which of course reference the need to provide safe care home and care at home provision. Chief Officers have now provided a response to the Scottish Government on the work that local systems are doing to support the care home sector. Health Boards and HSCPs, in collaboration with Local government, have already drawn up mobilisation plans which of course reference the need to provide safe care home and care at home provision. Chief Officers have now provided a response to the Scottish Government on the work that local systems are doing to support the care home sector and there is evident good practice to draw upon including system-wide wrap around support for Care Homes. We will collate and promulgate good practice.

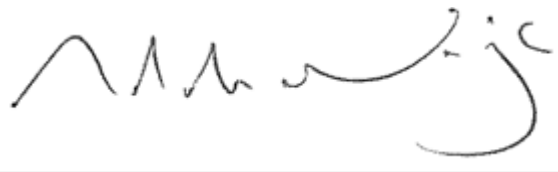
The Care Inspectorate and Public Health Scotland will play important roles in supporting you as well. I will be asking Public Health Scotland to continue to develop national standards and to identify potential support measures, building on the work that is already ongoing locally.

We are working with you to finalise educational material including algorithms to support infection prevention and control, reporting of suspected COVID-19 cases, segregation and cohorting requirements and escalation measures. It is our intention to share this material with you in the next week.

Finally, the CMO will shortly be setting up a short life task force of professionals with relevant expertise drawn from across government departments, charged with identifying urgently those interventions which will be most effective to combat the spread of Covid 19 in Scotland's care homes. This group will providing advice, guidance and support and engagement with the professions involved in local support measures. This will also include guidance to support the provision of staff required to meet the growing needs of residents in these settings.

Thank you very much for the contributions you and your teams will make to this extremely important task.

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Wright
Chief Executive of NHSScotland and Director General of Health and Social Care