



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Responsible Individuals of Care Services in Wales
Directors of Social Services
Local Authority Chief Executives
Association of Directions of Social Services Cymru
Care Forum Wales

1 September 2023

Dear Colleagues

I am writing to reinforce the importance of robust infection, prevention and control measures in line with [National Infection Prevention and Control Manual \(NIPCM\)](#) for Wales. As we move swiftly into autumn and winter and an expected increase in acute respiratory infections, this is a timely reminder. There has been a recent increase in COVID-19 case rates and hospital admissions in England, Scotland and Wales which is potentially concerning, and we must be mindful of the potential for onward transmission to care settings across Wales. This increase may be driven by changes to variants circulating, including the emerging variant of concern – BA.2.86 and we are unlikely to have a clear indication of the severity and transmissibility of this variant for several weeks.

Although measures currently give a mixed picture of COVID-19 infections, you may wish to consider planning for a respiratory / infectious segregated care provision with the aim of limiting spread of infections and outbreaks when community rates are higher. It may also be appropriate to re-introduce universal masking within care settings and ensure that care workers are fully trained in the use of their mask, face protection and other PPE in preparation for managing respiratory infections (including training and Fit testing in the use of FFP3 masks) in accordance with Appendix 1 of the Acute Respiratory Infection guidance.

[The Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Acute Respiratory Infections including COVID-19 for Wales](#) provides more detailed guidance, and the following sections should be highlighted where applicable to the provision of social care:

3.3. Cohorting

When an existing service user or a new admission has a suspected/confirmed ARI they should ideally be isolated in single rooms away from other care receivers. Where infectious cases exceed single room capacity cohorting of patients may be implemented and should be according to infecting organism. Patients with different infections should not be cohorted together and where a patient tests positive for more than one ARI e.g. Flu and COVID-19 then single room isolation should be prioritised.

4. Additional Infection Prevention and Control Measures for ARI in healthcare settings

4.1. Source control – Health and Care Staff:

Care staff should continue to wear facemasks (type IIR) when providing close personal care to anyone in a care home, community setting, or the home of someone where COVID-19 and/or flu is suspected/confirmed. Universal masking should be applied when there is known or suspected cluster transmission of ARI e.g., during an incident / outbreak, **and/or if a new COVID-19 Variant of Concern (VOC) emerges.**

You may also wish to consider the appropriate wearing of facemasks by symptomatic individuals (where tolerated) and requirements for facemasks for visitors, to reduce the risk of transmission from the community into care settings.

The Welsh Government's [Advice for health and care staff on respiratory viruses including COVID-19](#) provides more detailed guidance on the current testing regime and advice for management of respiratory viruses, but the following section should be highlighted:

Staff with symptoms of a respiratory tract infection including COVID-19

Any service user facing staff member who has symptoms of a respiratory tract infection including COVID-19 and/or has a high temperature is advised to stay at home and notify their employer as soon as possible.

When they no longer feel unwell and do not have /not had a high temperature and are ready to return to work they may wish to discuss with their employer ways to minimise any risk as some may still be infectious.

A Summary of advice for social care is provided in Welsh Government's [Social care approach to respiratory viruses, spring/summer 2023](#)

One of the key defences to reduce the impact of COVID-19 and the threat of a new variant is vaccination. The Autumn Booster Programme in Wales commences on 11 September and it is important that those who are eligible take up their offer of a vaccination, including health and care workers. We ask that care providers support access and time for staff to take up the offer for both flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. This will help prevent frontline workers becoming ill, reduce transmission to vulnerable service users and will also protect the resilience of the health and social care system from becoming overwhelmed. Due to the identification of the new COVID-19 variant BA.2.86 we are planning to schedule adult care home residents and those most at risk to receive vaccines first. Health boards will be contacting care homes within the next few days to make arrangements. This will help ensure our more vulnerable are protected against any potential early wave this winter.

We are continuing to monitor the epidemiology of BA.2.86 and PHW integrated surveillance and considering possible options for additional precautionary measures. We will publish the respiratory virus framework for autumn/winter during September and update you on any further developments.

Kind Regards



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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.