# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Covid-19 testing of healthcare workers and hospice staff** |
| **DATE** | **4 December 2020** |
| **BY** | **Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

Protecting our NHS and our most vulnerable citizens in Wales remains at the heart of our Covid-19 response, and one of the priorities of our testing strategy is to enable health and social care workers to continue providing care to people in hospitals and primary care and community care settings.

Asymptomatic testing of health and social care workers in Wales to date has assisted with outbreak control and been targeted at those working in clinical areas with vulnerable patients and those working in care homes. As we enter the winter months, we are taking further steps to assist with infection control and reduce transmission of Covid-19 in the Welsh NHS and social care settings by utilising lateral flow tests (LFTs), one of the new technologies developed through the UK mass testing programme, to test frontline health and social care workers on a rapid and regular basis.

Lateral flow testing detects the presence of the Covid-19 viral antigen from a swab sample. LFTs are handheld devices which produce results within 20 to 30 minutes, with the potential to be self-administered. They are being piloted for use in schools and universities, for people visiting care homes and in the current mass testing programme in Merthyr.

Following scientific validation of testing using LFTs, we are introducing a programme of regular, twice per week, asymptomatic testing of patient-facing health and social care workers in hospitals and primary care and community care settings, and others who have contact with people in those settings. This testing programme will include testing of staff delivering domiciliary care services and professionals visiting care homes and other social care settings.

It is vital everyone understands that testing alone cannot eradicate the risks associated with contracting and transmitting Covid-19. Testing is a risk mitigation step that needs to be taken alongside other infection prevention control measures, the effective use of personal protective equipment and appropriate social distancing and hand hygiene measures. While LFTs are not as sensitive as lab-based RT-PCR tests, scientific advice has indicated that by testing more frequently with LFTs, such as twice per week, their accuracy is on a par with RT-PCR tests.

The testing programme for health and social care workers using LFTs will be available for:

* Clinical health care workers, including doctors, nurses and allied health professionals.
* Non-clinical workers, including hospital porters, cleaning staff, catering staff and volunteers.
* Social care workers, including domiciliary care workers, social workers and inspectors visiting care homes and other social care settings.

We will begin rolling out the programme for these groups on an incremental basis from 14 December, initially by testing those working in health and social care services with high risks of Covid-19 transmission, and we plan to introduce testing in lower risk settings in the week of 11 January 2021. We are engaging with the health and social care sectors on the specific logistical requirements for each of these different groups to ensure testing is undertaken effectively and rapidly.

The safety and protection of the most vulnerable people in our communities is central to our response to Covid-19. Another step we are taking is to introduce regular asymptomatic testing of staff working in hospice in-patient units and those delivering hospice at home services. Arrangements are being finalised with hospices across Wales and we expect to begin rolling out testing from 14 December.