# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Wales Covid-19 Testing Strategy** |
| **DATE** | **15 July 2020** |
| **BY** | **Vaughan Gething MS, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

In recent months, the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and the NHS in Wales have worked together to build a national testing infrastructure in Wales for Covid-19. This has enabled us to ensure anyone with symptoms of coronavirus is able to access a test quickly and easily; and, in turn, to deploy contact tracing through our Test, Trace, Protect strategy to control transmission until a vaccine or treatment is available.

Today we are releasing a Testing Strategy for the next phase of responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, as we emerge from lockdown with prevalence reducing and make preparations for the possibility of further peaks in the autumn and winter. The Strategy builds on the latest scientific evidence and focuses on four priority areas for testing:

1. Controlling and preventing transmission of the virus by supporting contact tracing.
2. Protecting NHS services to prevent, protect and deliver testing to support the safety of staff, patients and clients.
3. Protecting vulnerable groups and managing increased transmission rates to safeguard and control infection in groups, communities or settings with greater risks.
4. Developing future delivery to utilise health surveillance and new technologies to improve our understanding of the virus and innovate new ways to test.

There are currently two different forms of testing in Wales: virus detection, which shows if someone currently has Covid-19; and antibody testing, which is used to determine whether a person has been infected previously. The strategy reminds us that testing is not something that is just done and counted but that testing should have a clear purpose underpinned by evidence. The Strategy also sets out:

* the continued role of asymptomatic testing and how it can be used in outbreaks and to test groups facing the greatest risks of contracting and being infected by Covid-19, such as older people and health and care workers; and
* the purpose of antibody testing in understanding seroprevalence. To date over 32,000 tests have taken place amongst healthcare workers in secondary, primary and community care settings and of teaching staff. Social care workers and residents are a priority and a pilot is being developed to undertake antibody testing using a new and less invasive form the test.

I know that the data and evidence is continuing to evolve and questions remain about the virus and the individual immune response. To keep pace with changing evidence and developing testing technology, the testing strategy will be a living document and evolve alongside these developments. We will continue to work together with our NHS and other key partners to keep improving our testing arrangements.

**Testing in Care Homes**

The protection of the most vulnerable people in our communities has been at the heart of our response to the pandemic. We have prioritised support for people living and working in care homes through the following testing policies:

* All residents in care homes were offered testing during May and June, whether they were symptomatic or asymptomatic.
* Following the testing programme for all care home staff and residents, all staff in care homes have been tested on a weekly basis since 15 June, whether they were symptomatic or asymptomatic.
* Where there is an outbreak in a care home, all staff and all residents are tested whether they are symptomatic or asymptomatic.
* All people discharged from hospital to live in care homes are tested, whether or not they were admitted to hospital with Covid-19.
* All people transferred between care homes, or admitted to care homes from the community, are tested whether they are symptomatic or asymptomatic.

I want to thank all care home managers, staff and residents for their ongoing commitment to ensuring care homes in Wales are provided with the support they need to minimise harm from Covid-19 on the vulnerable residents in their care. Their hard work has meant the number of new infections diagnosed in care home staff is very low, with a current prevalence rate of one case in every thousand staff members tested.

The scientific advice is that there is limited value in maintaining weekly testing of care home staff on an ongoing basis where rates of prevalence of infection from Covid-19 are low, with an increased likelihood of false positive tests at low prevalence rates.

I recognise the need to maintain confidence in this sector. We will therefore extend the current weekly testing regime for a further **four weeks** to allow for monitoring of easements and their potential impacts.  However if low prevalence trends continue then I expect to be in a position to reduce care tome testing to fortnightly from the 10 August. I will continue to closely monitor prevalence rates in care homes and the potential impacts of the measures we are taking to ease lockdown restrictions, as people increase their contact with others, their use of services and their movement outside their local area.

I will continue to review and adapt our policy for testing in care homes based on the data from testing and the developing scientific evidence.

[https://gov.wales/covid-19-testing-strategy](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fgov.wales%2Fcovid-19-testing-strategy&data=02%7C01%7CGovernment.Plenary.Business%40gov.wales%7C95614dbb827d47bd480508d828b390ce%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C637304098971792770&sdata=W1JyerWarcgTOdCdus2GRCleN1rIEIOPjT65Jrla91s%3D&reserved=0)