

23 July 2021

Dear Colleagues

## **CONTINUED ADHERENCE TO ALL PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES**

You will all be aware of the rising number of cases of COVID-19 circulating in our communities and the upsurge in cases of the Delta Variant which has a higher transmissibility rate than previous variants. The steps that you have all taken to reduce the spread of infection across all Health and Social Care (HSC) services has been significant in reducing the impact of the virus on our patients, residents and service users, and on our staff. Thank you for your ongoing work in this area.

As we progress through this very challenging fourth surge of the pandemic, it is vital that everyone takes responsibility to adhere to Public Health advice, both within and outside of Health and Social Care environments, so that COVID-19 transmission can be reduced.

Outlined below are some important messages which are worth repeating:-

- **Infection Prevention & Control**: In order to prevent and mitigate outbreaks of COVID-19 across all our Health and Social Care services, robust and continuous implementation of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance and practices is essential. This requires effective use of appropriate PPE, ensuring adherence to hand hygiene guidance, maintaining the enhanced cleaning of all environments that is already in place and appropriate management of footfall within and across healthcare settings.

It is important that COVID-19 secure practices are encouraged in all communal areas and administrative offices; this is equally important in staff only spaces, as it is in areas where care and support are delivered to patients and service users.



Staff should ensure that they adhere to the required Public Health measures in these areas, this includes maintaining strict social distancing, ensuring that good hand and respiratory hygiene is practiced by all and that there is good ventilation.

It is also important that staff working in COVID-19 secure environments, and who are required to consistently wear PPE, have frequent socially distanced breaks. Organisations should continue to ensure the provision of emotional and psychological support services for all their staff.

Within a Care Home setting, it is important that when an outbreak is declared, that support visits including IPC visits by HSC Trusts take place and are planned and agreed with the Care Home Manager in advance. Support visits should make best use of resources, both within Trusts and Care Homes, in order to enable the highest standards of care.

- **Social Distancing:** Risk assessment and the use of mitigation measures are encouraged to prevent overcrowding, and streamline (minimise) footfall in order to prevent the spread and transmission of COVID-19. These include:-
- a. 2-metre spacing
  - b. Utilisation of screens where necessary
  - c. Effective ventilation
  - d. Hand hygiene stations
  - e. Wearing of face masks for staff
  - f. Wearing of a face covering for all visitors to the facility

Particular attention must be paid to rest and break rooms used by all staff; this includes areas used by clinical and non-clinical staff. All staff must observe the behaviours required to maintain 2m social distancing. Social distancing in staff rooms can be achieved by ensuring that breaks are staggered and that several people are not using rooms at the same time. It is particularly important that such areas have a robust and recorded risk assessment and when it is deemed that the rest or break area is NOT COVID-19 secure, a face covering or clinical grade face mask should be donned by all staff. These areas should be subject to enhanced environmental cleaning, as per the organisation's cleaning policy, with the frequency and quality of environmental cleaning being assured.



- **Supporting Staff, Visitors and Residents:** It is recognised that there is COVID-19 'fatigue' and there is a need to continue to reinforce Public Health messages. Staff, patients, visitors and residents should be supported to adhere to infection prevention and control measures, including IPC measures and best practice. This requires good communication, recognising that a range of communication approaches will be required, given the population groups involved.

Please ensure all staff are aware of their options regarding access to vaccination. Separate communication has been sent to services outlining the options available to access the vaccine. Further details may be obtained from:

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

- **Uniform Policy:** The following are key points relating to uniforms and a reminder that staff should follow the uniform policy for their respective organisation:-

- ❖ Clinical staff who wear a uniform, should where possible, change into and out of uniform at the workplace. I would also ask employers to make sure staff have a sufficient quantity of uniforms to allow them to wear a clean uniform every day, or access to clean scrubs.
- ❖ Staff who are permitted to wear a clinical uniform to and from work should have it covered completely when travelling. Whilst this does not normally apply to community staff, we are aware that some staff have been criticised by members of the public for wearing uniforms outside hospital. Therefore, we are recommending the same approach for community staff at this time.
- ❖ Where a laundry service is provided for uniforms, this must be used as a first choice. Where staff are required to launder their own uniforms, guidance must be provided on how to do this safely and effectively.

We would ask that all Health and Social Care services, statutory and independent, take account of the information outlined in this letter and ensure that all the measures and standards noted are in place across their respective organisations. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all providers



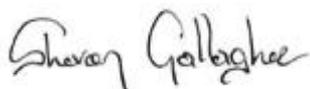
for your continued hard work and diligence in supporting the fight against COVID-19.

Your leadership and support is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Executive, PHA



**Sharon Gallagher**  
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**Briege Donaghy**  
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