Regular asymptomatic testing for Personal Assistants

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) are pleased to announce the roll-out of weekly PCR testing from 17th February for personal assistants working in Adult Social Care in England. Please do pass this information on to personal assistants and employers in your area and please invite them to join our regular webinars for more information, starting Wednesday 17th February at 12:30pm and weekly thereafter.

We recognise the importance of personal assistants (PAs) in providing an essential service to individuals that require care in their own homes, both those in receipt of direct payments and those who are self-funding. For this reason, we are rolling out regular testing in line with domiciliary care workers in CQC registered organisations in addition to the existing support available to PAs to keep themselves and those they provide care and support to as safe as possible. This includes guidance on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures and the availability of free PPE (further information below).

For testing purposes, a PA is someone who is directly employed by an individual (or self-employed) to provide care and support to enable them to live as independently as possible. This care could include support in the home, or to go out into the community. All PAs who provide care that requires them to come within 2 metres of the person they support and who support adults over the age of 18 are eligible for testing. This includes other directly employed carers who may not identify themselves as a PA but meet the above eligibility criteria. Further information about how PAs can order PCR tests is below.

PAs should begin testing as soon as possible and should isolate for 10 days if they receive a positive test. As long as appropriate PPE is being worn, people that PAs care for will not be considered to be a contact and will not need to isolate. PAs who need to self-isolate may be entitled to financial support; further details are below. Regular asymptomatic testing has very important benefits:

- Evidence has shown that up to 1 in 3 people have Covid-19 but no symptoms. Identifying people without symptoms so they can isolate, helps to break the chains of transmission of Covid-19.
- This protects people PAs care for by identifying asymptomatic carers before Covid-19 is transmitted to people they care for.
- In conjunction with other IPC measures, it provides reassurance to PAs and the people they care for that their care is as safe as possible.

Although testing is an important measure to identify Covid-19 positive PAs quickly and enable them to isolate, testing is only one part of wider infection prevention and control measures (such as hand washing, social distancing and the proper use of PPE) and does not eliminate the risk of Covid-19.

We are aware that some PAs and the people they care for may have already been offered a first dose of vaccine. Clinical experts advise that everyone should continue to follow all IPC measures regardless of whether they have received a vaccination, until we have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the vaccine in the population and its impact on viral transmission. PAs should continue to test regularly and maintain strong infection prevention and control measures even after vaccination.

Below we have set out some additional information to answer any key questions PAs may have. For any further questions, please join our weekly interactive webinar
https://event.webcasts.com/starthere.jsp?ei=1433378&tp_key=cc65e8ae2d

Thank you,

Department of Health and Social Care

PA testing overview

- PAs will be able to self-identify as eligible for testing from https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test and order 4 test kits per month for weekly Covid testing

- Every 7 days, complete one test kit, register it and return by Royal Mail Priority Post box

- Receive a result within 48 hours and take action if necessary

- Repeat weekly testing cycle and reorder test kits every 28 days

- Full details can be found in the guidance document here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-personal-assistants Key information is also below.

How to place an order

- PAs or employers on their behalf place an order from: https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test

- They will need to select the option for an "essential worker", select they have no symptoms and then follow the options to select "I'm a personal assistant in England employed by an individual to provide home-based adult care and support".

- After entering their details, they should select their occupation as "Care worker or home carer" and the employer name as "PA". They will then need to enter their own details 4 times to receive 4 test kits.

- Every 28 days, they should repeat this ordering process to have another set of 4 kits delivered.

Receiving Results

- The PA will receive the result by email and text message to the details they registered their test to.

- A negative test means it is likely they did not have Covid-19 when the test was taken and can continue to work maintaining all IPC measures and weekly testing. If they develop symptoms, they should self-isolate and take another test, or if they are a contact of someone who has tested positive, they should self-isolate for 10 days.

- An invalid or void result means it was not possible to say if the PA had Covid-19 when the test was done. They should do another test as soon as possible using one of the test kits they have. If they are a contact of someone who has tested positive, they should self-isolate for 10 days.

- If the result is positive, the PA will have to self-isolate immediately for 10 days from the date of the positive test and they should inform their employer of the result. The employer may need to make alternate arrangements for their care and support needs whilst the PA self-isolates. The PA will also be contacted by NHS Test and Trace for contact tracing. If all IPC measures were in place while working, including wearing full PPE, then their employer will not be considered a contact and will not need to self-isolate.

Personal assistant testing webinars

We will be holding regular interactive personal assistant testing webinars weekly. These last up to an hour and give detailed information about all aspects of testing for personal assistants, including:

- Ordering tests
- Preparing for testing
- Registering and posting test kits
- Results and what they mean

https://event.webcasts.com/starthere.jsp?ei=1433378&tp_key=cc65e8ae2d

These will also be available recorded to watch back at any time from the link above. The content of the webinars will largely be the same for each session, although they will include key updates on testing so are subject to change. We will announce any key updates via our bulletins to those who register for the webinar.

Additional support for personal assistants

- Guidance for PAs during Covid is available. This includes information on IPC measures, access to PPE, details about Statutory Sick Pay if a PA needs to self-isolate, and support with creating a contingency plan. Available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-people-receiving-direct-payments/coronavirus-covid-19-qa-for-people-receiving-a-personal-budget-or-personal-health-budget

- If a PA needs to self-isolate, they may also be entitled to a £500 Test and Trace support payment via their local authority. The eligibility criteria and guidance is available here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme

If there's an emergency

Please remember that if anyone is off work with symptoms, finding it difficult to cope with their illness, their condition gets worse, or their symptoms do not get better after seven days, use the https://111.nhs.uk/COVID-19 service or call NHS 111. In a medical emergency, dial 999. They should not worry if a cough or loss of taste or smell continues after 7 days but other persistent symptoms should be checked.