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To: All NHS primary care contractors (medical, dental, optometry and pharmacy)

NHS England and NHS Improvement
Skipton House
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CC: Clinical commissioning groups (accountable officers)
Regional directors/RDRCPCH
Regional heads of primary care

16 December 2020

Dear colleagues

Rollout of lateral flow testing devices for COVID-19 testing of asymptomatic patient-facing staff delivering NHS services in primary care

On [9 November](#) we announced that the Government had agreed that testing will be made available to all asymptomatic patient-facing NHS staff. This letter confirms how all four primary care contractor groups (medical, dental, optometry and community pharmacy) in England can order lateral flow testing.

This mode of testing, together with qRT PCR tests, will improve virus detection in primary care, protecting staff, reducing transmission and improving the resilience of services.

The process for ordering and use is:

- Primary Care Services England (PCSE) will this week start to invite primary care contractors to order lateral flow testing devices.
- It is important that contractors only order test kits once they receive an invitation from PCSE. Primary care contractors should notify the person who manages their PCSE orders and their PCSE main contact that an invitation will be emailed in the next few weeks.
- Invitations to order will be staggered across NHS England and NHS Improvement regions to ensure a smooth ordering process (this means not all providers may receive an invitation this week).
- **Following receipt of an invitation, organisations should log on and complete their order as quickly as possible. The final closing date for orders across all contractors will be Wednesday 30 December.**
- Contractors will be asked to order one box for every patient-facing employee delivering NHS services. This should include any temporary patient-facing staff who provide NHS services through the contractor but are employed through an agency or other kind of temporary arrangements (eg locums). Contractors should also ensure that their delivery addresses are up to date.
- Delivery for most contractors that have placed orders is expected to start from early January. Contractors should distribute one box to each member of patient-facing staff as soon as possible after delivery. Each box will contain 25 lateral flow tests, enough for 12 weeks.

- Standard operating procedures (SOPs) on lateral flow antigen testing in primary care can be found [here](#). Patient-facing primary care staff are asked to test themselves twice weekly and report their results to Public Health England (PHE), via the [NHS Digital online platform](#). **Please be aware that it is a statutory requirement to report all results, including negative, positive or void.** This platform will be available from the end of this week.
- Testing of primary care staff initially, using the Innova lateral flow antigen device, will take place twice weekly. Lateral flow antigen testing has a lower sensitivity than qRT PCR, the testing frequency is to mitigate this. For any positive result, the staff member should get an urgent confirmatory qRT PCR test performed.
- An NHS staff instruction leaflet on self-testing with lateral flow devices is available [here](#). Primary care contractors are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the leaflet and SOP and share information with their staff as appropriate.
- Anyone who tests positive with a lateral flow antigen test will be required to follow [government guidelines](#), self-isolate with their household and get a confirmatory PCR test.
- If primary care contractors have any questions or require any additional information after reviewing the SOPs, they should email england.covid-ld@nhs.net.

Primary care contractors should already have access to the PCSE online portal, which is normally used to order secure stationery and supplies such as prescription pads, needles and syringes. However, if any primary care contractors do not have access, they should contact PCSE at www.pcse.england.nhs.uk/contact-us.

Lateral flow testing devices will be separately delivered to vaccination sites for vaccinator staff. No separate ordering for those staff is necessary, although the vaccination site should order for other patient-facing staff if required.

Information on the roll out of lateral flow antigen testing to primary care will also be provided at the next primary care webinar.

Thank you for all your ongoing work.

Kind regards,



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GP and Deputy Medical
Director for Primary Care



Ali Sparke
Interim Director for Primary
Care COVID Response



Nicola Hunt
Director for COVID Testing