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CABINET STATEMENT

Written Statement: Prioritisation COVID-19 Testing

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Over recent weeks I have issued statements setting out how Welsh Government is working with the NHS and Public Health Wales and other key stakeholders to make sure that testing is available where most needed.

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In addition to work to supplement capacity from Lighthouse labs with those operated by PHW, the UK's four Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) have been assessing the prioritisation of the testing programme.

I am today setting out the prioritisation for testing in Wales as we move into a new phase of our response, these reflect the priorities set out in our testing strategy:

Priority one will be to support NHS clinical care and focus on hospital patients, including all admissions, so that clinical judgements can be made to ensure the best care for these individuals.

Priority two will be to protect those in care homes. We know that people living in our care homes are particularly vulnerable to COVID. Based on SAGE and TAG advice, we will continue to test staff, with or without symptoms, fortnightly or, where local prevalence is significant, weekly. We will also test all new admissions and, in the event of an outbreak with a home, all residents and staff will be tested.

Priority three will be the testing of NHS staff, including GPs and pharmacists where possible, as protecting our NHS has been at the heart of our COVID response and is a clear priority in our Testing Strategy. We will continue to test NHS staff with symptoms but will move test asymptomatic staff in outbreaks and in areas of higher prevalence.

Priority four is targeted testing to support management of outbreaks and surveillance studies which will help to manage outbreaks in high-risk environments such as closed residential settings or higher-risk workplaces, where the risks of the virus spreading and chances of finding more positive cases is high. Surveillance testing refers to the population-wide Office for National Statistics study, essential trials for new potential vaccines, and studies of particular at-risk populations.

Priority five is to prioritise testing for symptomatic staff working in education or childcare settings where is it needed to keep the settings open. We are continuing to improve the testing system to ensure staff can get priority access when they have symptoms. Those who test negative can return to work, ensuring our education and childcare settings can remain open.

Priority six is testing all symptomatic individuals irrespective of local prevalence although it is important that individuals only book a test if they have key symptoms (a high temperature, a new continuous cough and a loss of taste or smell). People should self-isolate if they have any of these symptoms, or if you are asked to by a contact tracer. By following this advice, we will be able ensure that the resources that we have available are being used as effectively as possible.

Our Testing Strategy, published in July, will be updated to reflect these priorities. The aims of that strategy remain - to ensure testing capacity is used to protect the vulnerable in care homes and hospital, respond to outbreaks and incidents and ensure our critical public services can be maintained.

The Welsh Government will continue to work with NHS Wales, Public Health Wales and other key stakeholders in a strong response to COVID-19 and these priorities will help ensure testing is available where most needed especially as we move towards the autumn and winter period.

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