

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Professor Sir Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 10/2024

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/SPPG/
HSC Trusts/NIAS

GP Medical Advisers, All General Practitioners and
GP locums (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)
OOHs Medical Managers (*for onward distribution to staff*)
RQIA (*for onward distribution to independent sector health
and social care providers*)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 10/2024

Date: 29 February 2024

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleagues

**UPDATE TO COVID-19 TESTING GUIDANCE: HSS(MD) CIRCULARS
WITHDRAWN**

1. The SARS-CoV-2 virus continues to circulate in our community, causing serious illness and in some cases death. However the threat from COVID-19 has significantly reduced due to the continued success of the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination programme, increased access to antiviral and antibody treatments and high immunity amongst the population in Northern Ireland.
2. The purpose of this letter is to advise that following a review of the extant guidance relating to COVID-19 testing by the Department's Expert Advisory Group on Testing, a decision has been taken that now is an appropriate point to update and refresh the current advice in relation to COVID-19 testing.
3. The Public Health Agency (PHA) has today issued refreshed operational guidance to health and social care settings, setting out updated advice on COVID-19 testing which is recommended as we progress through the Winter period. The PHA guidance can be accessed at the following link [Updated LFD Testing guidance, effective from 29 February 2024 | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#)
4. With immediate effect from the date of this letter, the following HSS(MD) Circulars are withdrawn:
 - [HSS MD 17/2022](#) dated 4 May 2022: Updated COVID testing and isolation guidance for health and care workers and guidance on visitor testing;

- [HSS MD 50/2022 dated 8 November 2022: Updated COVID-19 testing guidance to support clinical pathways; and](#)
 - [HSS MD 18/2023 dated 27 March 2022: Updated COVID-19 testing guidance to support clinical pathways.](#)
5. Moving forward, with immediate effect from the date of this letter, the PHA will assume responsibility for issuing all operational advice and guidance relating to COVID-19 testing.
 6. The Department and the PHA will continue to monitor the overall context in relation to COVID-19. All guidance and recommendations relating to COVID-19 testing are subject to change and further updates/advice will be issued by the PHA accordingly if/as needed.
 7. I would ask that this letter is cascaded throughout your organisation as appropriate.
 8. I would like to take this opportunity once again to thank you all for your continued commitment and dedication to serving the needs of all patients and service users across our health and care services in Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely



PROFESSOR SIR MICHAEL McBRIDE
Chief Medical Officer

Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)
 Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency
 Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
 Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, SPPG (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)
 Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts
 Director of Social Care and Children, SPPG
 Family Practitioner Service Leads, SPPG (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)
 Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians and School Medical Leads*)
 Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses, and Midwives*)
 Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts
 RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)

