

Coronavirus – testing regime to be expanded

Testing for coronavirus (Covid-19) is to be opened up to everyone over the age of 5 who is symptomatic.

This means anyone who is displaying any of the three symptoms of Covid-19 – continuous cough, high temperature, or loss of sense of taste or smell – will be able to book a test at the drive-through or mobile test centres.

A limited number of home test kits are also available through this programme. Tests were previously available to over-65s, key workers and to anyone who needs to work and cannot do so from home. They were also available to household members of those groups.

The extension in testing eligibility comes ahead of the rollout of the new Test, Trace, Isolate and Support (TTIS) approach which will be used to keep transmission in communities low as the country moves out of lockdown.

The extension is a four nation, UK-wide expansion of testing.

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: “This further expansion of testing will ensure that anyone with symptoms will be able to find out if they have COVID-19, and will therefore be able to know whether or not they should be isolating.

“As well as allowing more people to have a case of COVID-19 confirmed, today’s expansion will also be helpful as we build towards our strategy of test, trace, isolate and support – something that will be especially important as we start to

emerge gradually from lockdown.

“This is vital in order to keep transmission in communities low.”

Scottish Greens Parliamentary Co-Leader Alison Johnstone MSP said: “Scottish Greens have been calling on the Scottish Government to introduce regular testing of care home staff for some time now so I welcome the Health Secretary’s announcement that regular testing will now finally be introduced. It’s clear that regular testing will help provide reassurance to frontline staff, reduce the spread of the virus and protect vulnerable residents in care homes. I look forward to hearing when this testing will begin and how often tests will take place.

“I have also called for regular testing to be made available to frontline NHS staff, a move that I know would be most welcome and should be introduced as a matter of urgency.”

Jeane Freeman’s announcement that care home staff will be offered coronavirus testing “falls well short” of what’s required, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The health secretary said today that all workers in care facilities could all be tested, even if they weren’t displaying symptoms.

However, she stopped short of offering the same assistance to care home residents – hundreds of whom are dying from Covid-19 each week – and carers working in community settings.

Earlier today, the Scottish Conservatives called on the SNP government to utilise more testing capacity to reach the estimated 90,000 people living and working in care homes.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said: “This still falls well short of the comprehensive action needed to protect

care workers and those they care for.

“What we need is a commitment that, in addition to care home staff, all residents and community care workers will also be included in a repeat testing policy.

“Given the scale of the challenges being faced in our care sector and the tragic loss of life in care homes and among care workers, nothing less than a 100% testing policy, extending to all staff and residents, should be acceptable.

“Many people will be wondering how many lives in our care homes could have been saved if a more comprehensive testing regime had been put in place weeks ago.

“That’s why it is critical that the full test coverage so obviously needed is now immediately implemented by the Scottish Government.”

Ms Freeman defended the move not to test those care home residents without symptoms saying that the test is very invasive and some residents who have dementia which makes the test quite an ordeal.