



Department
of Health &
Social Care

CARE

From: Adult Social Care Delivery
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SE1H 0EU

To:

Adult social care service providers
Directors of Adult Social Care Services
Directors of Public Health, Health Protection Teams and wider stakeholders
Health Protection Teams and other relevant local bodies

11 September 2023

Dear colleagues,

BA.2.86 AND IPC BEST PRACTICE FOR AUTUMN/WINTER

On Friday 8 September, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) issued its [latest update](#) on the COVID-19 BA.2.86 variant. I understand that for many in the sector, press interest and speculation about this new variant is concerning, and so I am writing to remind you of the existing government guidance on coronavirus, and steps the government is taking.

The UKHSA has confirmed in its [technical briefing](#), 34 confirmed cases of BA.2.86 have been identified in England as of 4 September 2023. Of these, five were hospitalised and no deaths due to COVID-19 have been reported amongst these cases.

The cases include an outbreak in a care home in Norfolk which were identified by PCR testing of staff and residents after this was escalated to the local health protection team. The majority of residents and all staff have now recovered, with four residents remaining unwell. I want to reassure you that the home continues to be supported by UKHSA specialists working closely with Norfolk County Council.

UKHSA note that while this means there is a degree of community transmission, it is too early to draw conclusions on the transmissibility, severity, or immune escape properties of the virus. UKHSA are monitoring the situation closely and we'll keep you updated.

We recognise the immense efforts that all those working in adult social care have made over recent years, including several successful booster campaigns, and want to reassure you that we will continue to ensure measures are risk-based and proportionate.

There are a number of measures that I would like to draw your attention to. The government had already taken the [precautionary step of bringing forward the NHS's Autumn/Winter vaccination programme](#), as this is the best way to boost the immunity of those most vulnerable to coronavirus, and this has begun today in care homes in England.

Vaccinations, COVID-19 treatments, and following [IPC guidance](#) remain the best way to help protect against COVID-19 across adult social care, and we ask that you continue to promote the measures outlined below:

Encourage staff and residents to take up the latest COVID-19 and flu vaccinations when these are offered.

- Vaccination teams are now contacting providers and people who are homebound to arrange visits. They have been asked to ensure all eligible care home residents are vaccinated by 22 October.
- Staff working in residential care settings should have by now commenced the consenting process with residents to ensure maximum take up when vaccination teams visit.
- Staff are encouraged to book their vaccinations as early as possible via the Local Booking Services from 11 September, and the [National Booking Service](#) (NBS) from 18 September. Appointments can also be booked via the NHS App, or through 119.

Support people eligible for COVID-19 treatments

- Providers should closely monitor individuals who are eligible for COVID-19 treatments to ensure they can be supported to test as soon as possible for COVID-19, and access appropriate treatment if they test positive.
- Providers should check '[eligibility criteria](#)' for COVID-19 treatments (or with a health professional such as a GP) when a resident is newly diagnosed with an ongoing condition which may make them eligible.

Ensure tests are available to be used in line with guidance

- We encourage providers to ensure they have enough tests to test anyone eligible for COVID-19 treatments if they develop respiratory symptoms, and also to test up to the first 5 linked symptomatic residents in a care home if multiple residents develop symptoms.
- Residential care services can continue to order LFD tests from the [national ordering portal](#).

Ensure PPE is available to be used in line with risk assessments

- Providers should continue to use PPE where appropriate and ensure this is available for staff and visitors.
- Care workers and visitors do not routinely need to wear a face mask in care settings or when providing care in people's home. However, they should be worn if:
 - A person being cared for is suspected or known to have COVID-19
 - In the event of a care home outbreak
 - If a care recipient would prefer staff or visitors to wear a mask while providing care

Contact your local health protection team or other local partner if there are concerns

- In the event of multiple cases in residential settings, guidance sets out the steps that can be taken under normal circumstances.
- Support remains available from local health protection teams (HPT) or other relevant local partners to provide advice on measures if there are issues of concern, as set out in [guidance](#).

I hope this update is helpful and thank you again for all of your work to protect people across adult social care.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Armstrong

Director of Adult Social Care Delivery,
Department of Health and Social Care