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Sent by Email

20 December 2021

Dear colleague,

Further to my letter of 7 December about Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance I want to provide some further advice to the profession about managing the impacts of Covid-19 (Omicron) over the winter period within NHS dental services.

IPC Guidance

As you know, it is important to ensure that NHS dental services and related activity happens, safely. All practices must review and update, where necessary, their risk assessment to ensure any treatment can be done safely. Reference to the revised SOP may be of benefit and I have enclosed a copy here. In situations where urgent respiratory-pathway patients cannot be seen safely, including for reasons of significant staffing shortages or practice design, practices should contact their Health Board for further advice if you have not had information on local arrangements.

Remembering that capacity across the whole of primary care dentistry is limited, wherever possible GDS-registered patients should be seen within GDS. This includes care delivered within an urgent respiratory-pathway. It is in the best interests of patients to be seen at the practice where they are registered as far as safely possible.

Isolation policy

The self-isolation policy for health staff who are household or passing contacts of covid-19 positive cases has been revised, now staff will be exempt from the requirement to self-isolate for 10 days, where:

- they are double-vaccinated;
- they have had their Covid-19 booster vaccination at least 14 days prior to the contact occurring;
- they are and remain asymptomatic;
- they undertake a PCR test (which returns a negative test result before returning to work);

- on returning to work they undertake daily LFD testing for the period below:
 - For household contacts: 10 days from the date of symptom onset in the case, or test date if the case is asymptomatic.
 - For non-household contacts: 10 days from the last contact with the case.
 - The staff member must register the results of the daily LFD online and inform their manager. Adherence and reporting of daily LFD tests should be supervised by the line manager of the staff member
 - If the LFD result is positive, the staff member should isolate and seek a confirmatory PCR, whether or not they have had a previous positive PCR in the last 90 days.

Health care staff are ordinarily expected to return to work and to comply with the testing requirements set out above. Where staff are unable to return and practices become unable to see their registered patients, I would ask that practices review and confirm their 'buddy practice' arrangements.

Daily LFD testing

The evidence emerging is that Omicron has a higher rate of transmission than other variants. As early identification of cases is even more important with the new Omicron variant, we are strongly encouraging all HCWs to test daily. From January, all practices will be provided with sufficient LFD test kits to enable staff to carry out daily testing at no cost to dental teams. If your practice has sufficient test kits currently, I would urge you to move to daily testing from now onwards. Additionally, it is vital that each team member records the result of their daily LFD tests online. I enclose further information regarding this change.

Financial support

While the course of the pandemic over the next few months is uncertain, Scottish Government will continue to work with Health Boards and yourselves to support the sector and patients. In particular, I would like to reassure everyone that the current financial support arrangements will remain in place throughout the winter period. Moreover, I would encourage you to take up the Scottish Government funding available to improve ventilation and for speed increasing hand pieces, as these measures will support you to provide the maximum level of service to your patients within the wider public health situation.

Finally, I am pleased to say that the provision of Scottish Government funded PPE for NHS dental care will continue until end March 2023.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Ferris,
Chief Dental Officer

Encs.

COVID-19 – Moving Towards Routine Dental Care SOP – updated