



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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To: Chief Executives
Nurse Directors
Medical Directors

Dear colleague,

Re: Actions to protect NHS Wales hospitals during a third wave of COVID-19 infection.

You will be aware that on the 18 June 2021, the First Minister announced that Wales was in the early stages of a third wave of COVID-19 infection. In recent days we have seen the community transmission case rate rise above 50 per 100,000 population.

The repeated experience of the last fifteen months has been that a rise in community transmission rates has been associated with a rise in hospital admissions and nosocomial spread of COVID-19.

While we hope this association has been weakened by vaccination, we are writing as a precautionary measure to remind you of the responsibilities health boards and trusts have in taking action to protect hospitals.

These actions include implementing risk assessments and the hierarchy of controls including personal protective equipment (PPE) as set out in the revised UK Infection Prevention and Control (UK IPC) guidance 'COVID-19: Guidance for maintaining services within health and care settings Infection prevention and control recommendations Version 1.2' which can be found [here](#).

In complying with this guidance organisations will need to work to develop reliable systems for the exclusion of symptomatic individuals and to ensure that environmental modifications and signage are in place to enable adequate ventilation, social distancing and safe movement through the estate.

Asymptomatic transmission remains a very real issue and so it is crucial that protocols remain in place for staff and patient testing.

There is growing evidence of the efficacy of the vaccination programme in both reducing the acuity of illness for those with COVID-19 infection and in preventing

hospital admission. Data presented on the Public Health Wales Tableau database indicate that well in excess of 95% of Health Care Workers have received the first dose of vaccine and it is vital that we maintain the momentum of this programme in ensuring that as many health board staff as possible are fully vaccinated, in keeping with their professional responsibilities.

In addition to the emergence of the third wave of COVID-19 infections, we are also now experiencing a surge in other respiratory viruses. GP consultations in children for acute respiratory infections have increases as a proportion of all calls, and there has been a sharp increase in parainfluenza virus infections in children from week 19 onwards, above previous seasonal rates.

There was no significant increase in Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) infections in autumn/winter 2020/21, so it is possible that the season may occur earlier and be of higher intensity than in previous years, putting pressure on paediatric services. It is important to note that the IPC measures, risk assessments and application of the hierarchy of controls are also relevant in the management and prevention of spread of other infectious diseases including other respiratory viruses, so effective implementation and embedding of these IPC measures will not only be beneficial in terms of the third wave of COVID-19, but also in the prevention of spread of other infectious diseases.

To support NHS services in Wales to understand what respiratory diseases are circulating and potentially disrupting our services, Public Health Wales undertakes respiratory virus surveillance – reports available via the link below:

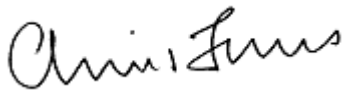
<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/page.cfm?orgid=457&pid=34338>

We would also now ask that from week commencing 12 July 2021 health boards and trusts should ensure that any hospital admissions (paediatric or adult) for respiratory symptoms / disease should be tested for the full respiratory virus panel and a Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) surveillance form completed. This is important as several infections will be contributing to the overall winter hospital burden, and SARI surveillance can track the causes and extent of these illnesses.

Finally we would ask that health boards and trusts are careful in the application of risk assessment for visiting in accordance with the recently updated guidance for hospital visiting in Wales which may be found [here](#).

We would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks for the exceptionally hard work of your organisation during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and to reiterate the need for awareness over the coming months during the third wave of infection and as we transition to Autumn / Winter preparedness with broader respiratory virus / infectious diseases in mind.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Jones". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

PROF CHRIS JONES

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gareth Howells". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

GARETH HOWELLS