

Date: 08/01/2021

Dear Care Home Manager,

Re: Mutual aid for emergency staff shortages

As we enter another lockdown, with coronavirus cases continuing to rapidly increase throughout the county, we realise the coming weeks will continue to be very difficult for you and your staff. Inevitably staff shortages will occur and we want to be clear of our expectations and support available.

We are asking care homes in Essex to refresh your plans from wave 1 to support each other in local areas (Mutual Aid) in circumstances where there is critical need for staff, and where you have exhausted your usual options such as agency staff. We are naturally looking at every way in which we can help you through such difficult situations but we believe that working together with providers local to you is the best option where the safety of your residents is at risk.

We must stress that mutual aid for staff shortages should only be used in these extreme cases as we recognise the risk of staff movement between care settings. However, as part of good business continuity planning, we are advising that relationships and processes are developed now, so they are in place and clear for the eventuality they may be called upon. We are finding that Night shifts are often most tricky to cover – consider whether you can reconfigure your rotas/ask your own staff to cover night shifts so that you are asking for agency or mutual aid support for day shifts.

Mutual aid for emergency staff shortages

The Mutual Aid approach we instigated in wave 1 is outlined at the foot of this letter (Annex A), and we have detailed below some important information including how to contact providers local to you.

Risk Assessment

Firstly we would advise you to risk assess the situation. If you believe that requesting support from a local provider is your only option please ensure you follow Infection, Prevention and Control measures.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) advice

It is vitally important that you continue to follow the [guidance set out by Public Health England on preventing and controlling infections](#), including use of [PPE](#), [isolation practices](#) and [decontamination and cleaning processes](#). This includes scrupulous hand and respiratory hygiene, and strictly adhering to PPE guidance and social distancing (Hands, Face, Space). This is especially important where there are instances of staff movement between homes. Additionally, we have included some FAQs from Public Health Colleagues to assist you which can be found in Annex B at the foot of this letter.

Many of you are eligible to order, free of charge, PPE supplies from the government's [PPE portal](#) but for those who are not able to you can [request supplies using this process](#). We therefore don't expect there to be any issues relating to access to PPE. To help, the NHS has set up a monthly webinar which will take place on the first Tuesday of every month (2pm-2.40pm) to support infection, prevention and control within Care Homes and Domiciliary care providers. A presentation will be followed by a chance to ask questions. You can join the webinar at the stated time [via this link](#).

Local Provider Contact List

To find care providers local to you please follow these instructions:

1. Go to <https://www.cqc.org.uk/>. Type your postcode into the search box and click 'search'. You can use the 'Refine your search' option on the left side of the site to filter results by service type (eg. 'Care homes').

- Alternatively please download the spreadsheet (taken from CQC data) which [lists providers broken down by area](#) in the different tabs.

Staff testing

Regular staff testing is recommended to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus.

Our Care Home Hubs will continue to support you throughout but please continue to inform the Emergency Duty Out of Hours Team where situations arise out of usual business hours - 0345 606 1212 or email eds@essex.gov.uk.

Outbreaks

Identification of a single case should be reported to the Health Protection Team (0300 303 8537, oe.crc@phe.gov.uk).

Please remind your staff that they are considered Critical Workers and can therefore continue to send their children to school and early years settings.

Additionally, access to data is crucial to us and our Health colleagues to be able to support the system. Please continue to supply information to the national trackers so we can identify and resolve issues swiftly.

Finally, on behalf of myself and all my colleagues working to support our vulnerable residents I'd like to thank you for your continue dedication, your resilience and compassion. It has been an extraordinarily difficult year and I know many of you will be concerned about the coming months. We will continue to do all we can to support you. Please be reminded of the [financial support](#) we have put in place to support you throughout.

Should you have any questions or comments please send them to ProviderResilience@essex.gov.uk

Yours sincerely



Mike Gogarty
Director Wellbeing, Public Health & Communities



Nick Presmeg
Executive Director, Adult Social Care

ANNEX A: ECC approach to Mutual Aid

What is Mutual Aid

Mutual aid in this context is an agreement among organisations to lend assistance and share resources across organisational boundaries.

Guiding Principles

- The most vulnerable people in Essex are safe
- Vulnerable people will be safeguarded
- Effective deployment of resources
- Citizens will connect with each other to offer support to others voluntarily
- Organisations, providers and citizens will work together to support the most vulnerable people

Our Expectations of providers

- All providers to work together to support the most vulnerable within your own duties and responsibilities; this may include sharing of staff, training, information, Protective Personal Equipment.
- Providers to make arrangements between themselves, to manage mutual aid;
 - o You will also need to think about processes for how you request mutual aid from other providers and how to respond to mutual aid requests from other providers or ECC

ANNEX B: Public Health FAQs

Question	Answer
Can staff support in more than one setting where residents are Covid-19+ve in both settings?	This is not an issue. In a care home with two wings, both with infected patients a member of staff could work on the two wings. If rather than two wings you had two care homes the risk would not change. It would be helpful for the member of staff to be caring for either infected or not infected residents (cohorting).
Can asymptomatic Covid-19+ staff work with Covid-19+ve residents?	Covid-19+ve staff, even if completely healthy, should not be at work and should be self-isolating at home.
What are reasonable measures to avoid and limit cross infection	This is standard infection prevention and control eg. exclude known and suspected infected staff / visitors; environmental cleaning with particularly frequent cleaning of 'touch points'; hand hygiene; social distancing of 2 metres when not in personal protective equipment (PPE); and PPE appropriate to the task.
Cohorting residents in a home where all are Covid-19+ve but asymptomatic (eg offering meals and supporting people in communal areas)	Cohorting covid-19 positive patients together is not considered a risk. They will not re-infect each other during an outbreak.