**Mandatory Testing in Approved Premises in England & Wales**

Testing continues to be our primary defence against COVID-19 and is important in identifying infected cases at the earliest opportunity. All HMPPS staff taking part in testing have played a critical in keeping their colleagues, residents and all vulnerable people safe from COVID-19. The effectiveness of testing has been particularly evidenced since the onset of Omicron, with the proportion of infections in staff and residents decreasing as testing has increased.

Since the temporary introduction of mandatory testing in December, we have seen uptake in rates of testing improve greatly and, whilst the number of outbreaks across Approved Premises (APs) during this time has increased, control measures such as testing have contained the scale and severity of outbreaks.

When mandatory testing was put in place it was agreed that it would be subject to frequent review, and that once the assessment indicated mandatory testing was no longer a reasonable and proportionate measure; it would come to an end. The decision to mandate testing was thoroughly considered and this change was deemed to be proportionate to the risk to APs.

Given the reduced risk of Omicron it has been decided that mandatory testing is no longer proportionate and as of 3 March 2022, the mandatory element to testing is no longer required.

Testing, however, continues to be important in containing the spread of Covid-19 within APs and so all staff are strongly encouraged to continue to test. We thank you for your participation so far and are keen for this to continue at the high levels it has been. Doing so will protect you, your colleagues, residents and vulnerable people from outbreaks and severe outcomes.

There remains the potential for re-introducing mandatory testing either nationally or locally in future, if proportionate to a heightened risk. This will be kept under ongoing review in liaison with Health partners.

Staff are strongly encouraged to continue to undertake 2 routine LFD tests per week as before. We thank you for your participation so far and are keen for this to continue at the high levels it has been.

**Assurance and Reporting and Further Steps**

* **Approved Premises should continue to strongly encourage staff to undertake routine testing**. High levels of uptake across the system will limit the spread of infection, keep people safe, and support sites in understanding spread and assessing risk.
* A decision may be made locally to increase the testing rhythm in response to increased risk, or in active outbreak sites.
* This change will mean that sites no longer need to undertake checks to monitor testing compliance.
* All sites must continue to submit their weekly data on the smart survey
* Test kit capacity remains available to order
* Please continue to test, encourage all staff to test and ensure that all staff have signed a consent form as provided in the staff testing manual
* Staff will continue to have access to tests at their place of work and will not be expected to pay for tests. Staff should continue to follow guidance from their line manager and will be advised to not attend work if they have symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19. Staff who are contacts of positive cases will continue to be offered the relevant HMPPS return to work testing program.
* AP Managers should remove any material in their APs which refers to mandatory testing. New material and additional staff comms will be issued shortly.

**Support**

If you have any questions, please contact HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk