

# Support package to protect care sector this winter

- Package of new measures announced to protect the social care sector from COVID-19
- Extra support for booster programme to protect the vulnerable and those providing care
- £300 million fund to help recruit and reward social care workforce
- Updated guidance on care home visiting and testing to keep residents, staff and visitors safe

Additional support is being offered to the social care sector as part of a package of new measures to protect people from the spread of the Omicron variant.

Vaccines remain our best line of defence and the NHS will redouble efforts to reach those care home residents who haven't yet had their boosters.

Specialist vaccination teams are being expanded and deployed to guarantee all care home residents and staff, as well as people who are housebound and their caregivers, are offered the booster – with those most at risk prioritised for the jab.

Care homes will be able to request follow up booster visits from vaccination teams for staff and residents and home visit payments for GPs will be increased to further ramp up the home care programme.

More than 70% of older adult care home residents have already received a booster jab and 97% of older adult care homes have been visited by vaccination teams. Those who haven't been visited, normally due to an outbreak, will receive visits shortly.

Care workers will benefit from a £300 million extension, in addition to the [£162.5 million announced in October, to support recruitment and retention](#). It can be used to pay for bonuses and bring forward planned pay rises for care staff, fund overtime and staff banks increasing workforce numbers up until the end of March.

This will in turn help reduce pressure on the NHS this winter by alleviating delays to discharge – freeing up beds and ensuring people are being cared for in the right place.

Recognising the importance of companionship for the health and wellbeing of residents, visits to care homes will continue under updated guidance that permits 3 visitors and an essential care giver per resident, in order to balance the current COVID-19 risk and the need to keep people safe in line with clinical advice.

Staff testing will be increased from 2 lateral flow tests per week to 3 as well as a weekly PCR test. Fully vaccinated residents visiting out will be

asked to take a lateral flow test on alternate days for 2 weeks after a visit. Those not fully vaccinated will be expected to isolate following a visit out.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Throughout the pandemic we have done everything we can to protect the adult social care sector, and the emergence of the Omicron variant means this is more important than ever.

This new funding will support our incredible workforce by recruiting new staff and rewarding those who have done so much during this pandemic.

Boosting the booster rollout in social care and updating the visiting guidance will help keep the most vulnerable people in our society safe from the virus this winter.

The Omicron variant has led to infections doubling every 2 to 3 days and estimates by UKHSA of 10,000 cases with increased transmissibility.

Care settings will be given extra guidance for infection prevention and control measures and PPE. The government has already committed to providing free PPE in care and announced an additional £388 million to support testing and infection control in September.

Minister for Care Gillian Keegan said:

Vaccination remains our best line of defence and we are going further and faster to ensure social care staff and those receiving care, whether in a care home or their own home, are prioritised for boosters.

Our priority throughout the pandemic has been the safety of those who are the most vulnerable however we need to balance this with the tremendous benefits that visiting provides.

These changes are in line with the latest clinical advice and are designed to support our fantastic social care staff in the months ahead.

These measures support the government's wider plan to improve social care. The 'People at the Heart of Care' white paper announced earlier this month, backed by £5.4 billion, provides a limit to the cost of care for everyone in the adult social care system for the first time, and significantly increases state support.

The transformed social care system will apply to people in both residential and at-home care and will set daily living costs at a lower rate than

originally proposed, helping people save more money. It will mean nobody is forced to sell their homes in their lifetime.

Further measures will be kept under review in line with the latest scientific advice.

Updated guidance on visiting will be published in due course.