

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Professor Sir Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 64/2023

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/HSC Trusts/NIAS
Deputy Secretary SPPG
GP Medical Advisers, SPPG
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward
distribution to practice staff) and Community
Pharmacies
OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)
RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers
including independent hospitals*)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 64/2023

Date: 19 December 2023

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

**COVID-19 TREATMENTS FOR THOSE AT HIGHEST RISK: CHANGE IN
REPORTING OF POSITIVE COVID-19 RAPID LATERAL FLOW TEST RESULTS**

COVID-19 treatments remain available from the HSC Trust-based Outpatient COVID-19 Treatment services (OCTs) for those groups of patients likely to be at highest risk of deterioration, hospitalisation or death from a COVID infection.

The website to report a COVID-19 rapid lateral flow test is changing. The [UK Health Security Agency \(UKHSA\) digital platform](#) for reporting test results online and the 119 telephone line to report tests results will no longer be available to Northern Ireland residents from 2 January 2024.

From 2 January 2024 at 9am, a new digital reporting platform will be available in Northern Ireland to allow continued online reporting of COVID-19 rapid lateral flow test results and continued digital identification of those patients eligible to receive COVID-19 treatments. This mechanism to identify patients eligible for COVID-19 treatments will continue to work alongside GP and GP Out-of-hours referral to Trust OCTs.

On 2 January 2024, [NI Direct Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): testing and stay at home advice webpage](#) will be updated with the new website link for reporting a positive lateral flow test result for those eligible for COVID-19 treatments. The current gov.uk

reporting website will also have information to re-direct any Northern Ireland patients to the new reporting webpage.

Those who are not able to report their test result online are advised to contact their GP or GP Out of Hours who can contact the Trust on their behalf.

[NI Direct Treatment for Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) will be updated and will continue to be the patient-facing source of information on Treatments for COVID-19, including who can access COVID-19 treatments and how to get a COVID-19 treatment, with links to the updated testing information. Please continue to signpost patients under your care, including any newly diagnosed patients, who may be eligible for COVID-19 treatments, to this website for information.

All clinical staff need to make themselves aware of the eligibility criteria for COVID-19 treatments and remind all eligible patients who are newly diagnosed or being reviewed, of the need to test when symptomatic and report any positive results.

This week marks two years since the establishment of the Outpatient COVID-19 Treatment service in Northern Ireland, that has now provided over 7,500 treatments. Thank you for your continued work and support to ensure those at highest risk from COVID-19 infection in the community receive treatment in a timely manner.

Actions required

HSC Trusts are asked to take the following immediate steps to support treatment of patients with COVID-19:

1. Continue to consider prescribing COVID treatments in line with the [NICE Technology appraisal guidance 'Casirivimab plus imdevimab, nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir, sotrovimab and tocilizumab for treating COVID-19' \[TA878\]](#),
2. Clinicians may wish to continue to refer to [NICE's rapid guideline on managing COVID-19 \(NG191\)](#) for medicines licensed, and currently used, in the management of COVID-19 for which NICE MTA recommendations have not yet been published.
3. Continue to advise eligible patients under your care, including any newly diagnosed patients, of their eligibility for COVID-19 treatments and how to access COVID-19 treatments.

GPS and GP Out of Hours service is asked to:

4. Continue to refer eligible patients to the HSC trust OCT services.
5. Continue to advise eligible patients under your care, including any newly diagnosed patients, of their eligibility for COVID-19 treatments and how to access COVID-19 treatments.

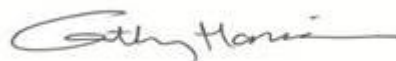
The **Strategic Planning and Performance Group** is asked to:

6. Continue to work with HSC Trusts and Primary Care to digitally identify patients eligible for treatment, and to support promotion of awareness among patients and their carers on the new lateral flow test reporting arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Prof Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Prof Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

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