



Chief Executives NHS Scotland

19 October 2020

Chief Executives,

I am writing to seek your support to continue improving adherence to Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Guidance in all our hospitals.

National Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infection (ARHAI) Scotland is reporting a significant increase in the number of COVID-19 outbreaks in Boards across Scotland, particularly in the central belt. As we know, wider community spread is a precursor to increased hospital infections so what we are seeing now is likely to be the beginning of a rising trend. It is vital that we increase our efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our hospitals.

Current reports show that breaches of IPC guidance are common to many outbreaks. It is also notable that Boards are having to reinforce the 'stay at home and take a test if you have symptoms' message – both are consistent with lessons learned in the initial wave. Whilst we are doing more work to understand the causes of outbreaks, there are some recurring themes relating to the incorrect use of face masks and lack of physical distancing, particularly during breaks, when car sharing and outside of work. It is vital that facilities exist for staff to have socially distanced breaks and that staff are reminded of the importance of social distancing, both on and off duty.

Colleagues are already working to address these issues locally within hospitals and, nationally, ARHAI Scotland is producing a COVID-19 Addendum to provide clear guidance, on a single platform, which takes account of the operational environment in NHS Scotland. Additionally, the Scottish Government, ARHAI and NHS Education for Scotland (NES) are working together to develop additional resources and messaging to support staff which will be issued soon. I will be actively engaged in increasing awareness of the importance of following IPC guidance and hope that by sharing this information and intelligence with you, you can continue to drive improvement locally.

In terms of the built environment, which can be a significant factor in outbreak management, WHO and the Centre for Disease Control have now confirmed that there is risk of longer range aerosol spread in closed environments with poor ventilation. It is important, therefore, to consider best practice on ventilation.



A Frequently Asked Questions document, and other supporting information, is currently available in the NSS Microsoft Teams channel for the built environment - for those that require access please contact NSS/HFS. This is a closed NHS Scotland channel to prevent version control issues, which, for those with access, can be found at the following link: [NSS - HFS/ARHAI Covid-19 FAQs and Supporting Documentation](#).

In the spirit of continuous improvement, I would be grateful if you can consider what more you can do within your own hospitals to reinforce critical IPC messaging. For example;

- Are current face mask and distancing posters prominently displayed?
- Are messages cascaded to staff effectively and regularly?
- Are staff completing mandatory IPC training?
- Are those who speak up when they see breaches supported and are there local champions in place who reinforce best IPC practice?
- Is 2 metre distancing consistently observed – and where it can't be, are other IPC precautions in place?
- Are staff being reminded of the case definitions for COVID-19?
- What is being done to increase uptake of staff testing - including greater promotion and engagement, clearly advertised and regular appointment times, accessibility and convenience for staff?
- How are Boards assuring that these important control measures are happening reliably?

We are undoubtedly at a critical juncture and must redouble our efforts now to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our hospitals and ensure the safe and effective delivery of health and care services over the coming months.

As ever, you have my sincere thanks for everything you are doing.

Yours sincerely,



PROFESSOR FIONA MCQUEEN
Chief Nursing Officer