Title: 3  c) Serial Testing in Nursing Homes

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Action required:
☐ For noting
☐ For discussion
☐ For decision

Approved for future publication: YES/NO (remove as applicable)
We are entering the 4th cycle of Serial testing in Residential Care Facilities for Older Persons having begun on 14th October 2020 (a report on the 3rd cycle is appended). The testing is continuing on a two-weekly cycle. At the request of NPHET, the HSE has reviewed what has happened in previous cycles and the proposed testing strategy in order to consider the frequency of the cycles.

Based on both Public Health review and the potential impact on Testing capacity it was noted that:

- **Targeted Improvement in Uptake**
  - With the increasing levels of detected cases across all CHOs there is an urgent need to increase the level of uptake of serial testing in all RCFs for Older Persons.
  - Cycle 3 saw a slight improvement in uptake from 69% to 71%. RCFs should be targeting 100% staff tested in each two-weekly cycle.
  - To support this the HSE are working with Nursing Homes Ireland (NHI) undertaking a target approach for improvement in facilities where low uptake is visible. If required, additional support will be provided to these facilities to improve the uptake rate.

- **Frequency of Testing**
  - The HSE recommend continuing to complete two-weekly testing in all RCFs for Older Persons.
  - This two-weekly cycle ensures Public Health teams can action any required mass testing required in between the fortnightly testing timetable allowing management of any potential outbreaks.

- **Inclusion of other groups**
  - Consideration is required to increasing the scope of those included in the serial testing programme.
  - Currently, there are a number of religious orders who are operating as RCFs for Older Persons included in the programme. We are working to understand if there are others that fall into this category for inclusion and will include them where they meet the RCF for Older Persons criteria (i.e. have 24-hour nursing care)
  - Other at-risk groups including RCFs for Mental Health should be included in the serial testing programme. c.150 facilities have been identified that could be included as priority.

- **Impact on other testing streams**
  - This programme is ongoing at a time where the testing requirement is increasing in the community and in other mass testing programmes.
  - If this continues to increase it will have impacts on other testing services.

- **Public Health**
  - A two-weekly schedule is appropriate bearing in mind the detected rate and the need for additional investigation of the detected HCWs and staff.
  - It is strongly believed that the testing could become the main thrust of prevention and hence ignoring the far more important IPC, social distancing and advice on not working with symptoms.
  - Also, it would be more productive to raise uptake to greater than 90% first.

**Conclusion**

It was felt that the best approach was to maintain the present two-weekly cycle whilst expanding the remit and seeking to increase the uptake.