

GALAXY STAFFING POLICIES & PROCEDURES

COVID-19

Validated	October 2023
Scope	This procedure It is written in line with the respective guidance: • for England, from the Government, Public Health England, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Care Quality Commission • for Wales, there is corresponding guidance from the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and the Care Inspectorate Wales. It is noted that most of the public health guidance to support care providers in their management of their services during the outbreak has been produced jointly for Scotland, there is specific guidance from Public Health Scotland, COVID-19 – Information and Guidance for Care Home Settings
Purpose	To provide staff, service users, visitors, contractors and other professionals with information on how to safely visit our clients' homes and how to prevent the virus from spreading in the community
Procedure Owner	Galaxy Staffing Ltd.
Last review date	October 2023
Last review date	October 2024
Review Frequency	Annually
Authorisation	Sulochana Chhetri
Signature	

Policy

- This policy has been written to cover the operational procedures necessary for Galaxy Staffing to protect its clients, service users we support, visitors and staff from the risks presented by coronavirus (Covid-19) infection.

What is Coronavirus?

- The World Health Organisation defines coronaviruses as a family of viruses that cause infectious illness ranging from very mild to very severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). Covid-19 is a new strain which originated in China at the end of 2019. It has since spread worldwide, initiating a global pandemic public health emergency.

How is Coronavirus Spread?

People can catch Covid-19 from others who have the virus.

It is understood that the virus is highly infectious and moves from person to person in droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with Covid-19 coughs or exhales. In addition, the virus can survive for up to 72 hours out of the body on surfaces.

People can catch Covid-19 if they breathe in the droplets or touch infected surfaces and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

It is known that infected individuals who show no symptoms may still be able to pass on the virus, especially in the early stages of infection. This is described as asymptomatic spread.

What Are the Symptoms?

The main symptoms of coronavirus infection are fever and high temperature, a new, continuous dry cough and/or loss or change to the sense of smell or taste. Other less common symptoms include aches and pains, nasal congestion, headache, tiredness and fatigue. Symptoms begin gradually and are usually mild.

Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. A small percentage can become seriously ill and develop difficulty breathing. This is particularly dangerous for people with weakened immune systems, for older people and for those with long-term conditions, such as diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

Information

We will keep up to date with the latest public health and national Government information about the risk of coronavirus in the UK. The infection control lead for the company will maintain close links with local health protection teams and will be responsible for circulating essential information to staff and residents and their families. They will also update our management team.

We will comply fully with official advice and updates published by the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England, and/or the equivalent guidance for Wales and Scottish care homes and social services providers issued by the Care Inspectorate Wales, Public Health Wales and Public Health Scotland.

- Admission and Care of Residents in a Care Home During COVID-19 (England)
- Guidance for Providers of Social Care Services for Adults During the Covid-19 Pandemic (Wales)
- Guidance to Prevent COVID-19 Among Care Home Residents and Manage Cases, Incidents & Outbreaks in Residential Care Settings in Wales
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – Resource for Care Workers Working in Care Homes During Sustained COVID-19 Transmission in England
- COVID-19: Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) (England and Wales)
- COVID-19 – Information and Guidance for Care Home Settings (Scotland)

Infection Control and Prevention Procedures

We believe that general adherence to high standards of infection prevention and control is the best way to prevent the person-to-person spread of pathogens such as coronavirus and maximise the safety of staff, residents and visitors. To achieve this our infection control policies

and procedures will be implemented in full, especially those related to effective hand hygiene, sanitisation and environmental cleaning.

Supervisory staff should make sure that people:

- cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or their sleeve (not their hands) when they cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately
- wash their hands with soap and water regularly for 20 seconds and use hand sanitiser gel (at least 60% alcohol) if soap and water are not available
- try to avoid close contact with people you support, especially those who are unwell
- avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- wear face coverings where two metre physical distancing is difficult to maintain and where the regulations make their wearing compulsory
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Staff should comply fully with hand sanitisation policies and procedures. Managers will ensure that policies are supported by the provision of appropriate resources such as hand sanitiser gels.

Environmental cleaning will be increased while the pandemic continues and there is risk of transmission. Regular cleaning of frequently touched hard surfaces with a suitable disinfectant and cleanser will be carried out.

We will comply fully with all existing infection control and prevention guidance, including:

For England, the Health and Social Care Act 2008: Code of Practice on the Prevention and Control of Infections and Related Guidance.

For Wales, the *National Infection Control Manual (NICM)*, published by NHS Wales/Public Health Wales.

For Scotland, National Infection Prevention and Control Manual (NIPCM) published by Health Protection Scotland.

Staying Home and Social Distancing

During the early stages of the pandemic when infection rates in the community reached their peak, the UK Government imposed a “lockdown” which involved the population being told to stay at home to prevent the spread of the virus.

People were only expected to go outside:

- to shop for necessities, such as food and medicine
- to carry out exercise
- for medical or care needs, for example to help a vulnerable person
- when travelling to and from work, but only where work could not be done from home.

At the height of the pandemic key workers (“critical” workers in Wales) were still free to travel to and from work. This included healthcare and adult social care workers, ambulance and fire personnel, the police and those involved in food production and distribution.

People staying home were told not to have visitors, even from friends or family. In addition to enhanced hand and respiratory hygiene they were told to observe “social distancing” rules, i.e. keeping a safe distance from others outside of their immediate household. Vulnerable people, including those aged 70 and over, were advised to be particularly stringent in following these measures.

Virus transmission rates were monitored by a scientific group advising the Government and when the risks were sufficiently reduced, a phased relaxation of the lockdown restrictions began. Connected Stars will keep up to date with the changes and will update its own policies and risk assessments as required. At all times resident and staff safety from the risks of the Covid-19 virus will be our key concern.

Throughout the pandemic period it has been the policy of Galaxy Staffing to ensure that all public health messages, including those relating to staying home and social distancing, were passed on to staff and our clients. We have endeavoured to keep residents safe by asking staff and clients to observe social distancing wherever possible when interacting with each other and when not involved in direct personal care.

Staff Health and Self-isolation

Government strategy is to ask people to self-isolate in their homes where they have symptoms of Covid-19 infection or think that they might have the virus. This policy will continue for the foreseeable future and we will continue to implement it where it is required, including any requirements for test and trace.

Staff who are unwell with suspected Covid-19 or who have come into contact with an infected individual or who share a household with someone who is unwell should not come to work but must comply with the latest Government advice about self-isolating themselves in their home.

The guidance states that:

- those who have symptoms of infection and live alone should self-isolate by staying at home and not leaving their house for as per government guidance.

From 16 August 2021, if a fully vaccinated worker or volunteer is found by NHS Test and Trace to have had relevant, close contact with someone who has COVID-19, they will not be required to self-isolate and can continue to work if they have received:

- a negative PCR test
- daily negative LFD tests for the duration of their otherwise isolation period

Consideration should be given to how to ensure fully vaccinated staff can deliver safe care during the 10 days after being identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. This should be built into the supported living setting's general risk assessment for responding to infectious diseases.

Staff need to follow the Return-to-work flowchart if they suspect they have come into contact with Covid-19.

All staff who are self-isolating must inform their line-manager as soon as possible that they will not be in to work.

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We take all reasonable measures to prevent the transmission of the Covid-19 virus via staff, including:

- ensuring that staff are supported to self-isolate in line with Government guidance if they need to
- ensuring, where possible, that members of staff work in only one home – this includes staff who usually work across different homes or staff that work on a part-time basis for multiple employers and agency staff

We are aware that the Government has provided an Infection Control Fund to support homes in ensuring that self-isolating staff are fully paid while doing so. In addition, we understand that the fund can also be used in the following ways:

- to support active recruitment of additional staff (and volunteers) if they are needed to enable staff to work in only one home or to work only with an assigned group of residents or only in specified areas of a home
- to limit the use of public transport by members of staff
- to provide accommodation for staff who proactively choose to stay separately from their families to limit social interaction outside work.

[See also the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Testing in Care Homes Policy and Coronavirus (Covid-19) Test and Trace: Contingency Planning (England) Policy.]

“High-risk” Individuals

We are fully aware that there is published guidance for England and Wales on the protection of people, which includes many supported living residents, who have conditions that make them “high-risk”. Guidance on Shielding and Protecting People Who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable from COVID-19 (England and Wales) sets out details of a special “shielding” scheme for high-risk individuals that was in operation prior to the relaxation of lockdown. We understand that this scheme is currently suspended but may be reinstated if transmission rates increase. Updated guidance will be notified to care staff and its action points incorporated in care planning and care provision as required.

Wales guidance is found on the GOV.WALES website.

For Scotland there is corresponding guidance on the NHS Inform website.

Service users and Self-isolation

Where a Service User develops the symptoms of Covid-19, they will be isolated in their bedroom. Staff should:

- minimise the risk of transmission through safe working procedures and implementation of infection control policies
- use personal protective equipment (PPE) for activities that bring them into close personal contact
- use new PPE for each episode of care

We are following all official guidance on the use of PPE.

[See Coronavirus PPE guidance for care homes.]

Support Planning

Vulnerable service users will be identified, and plans will be put in place to ensure their safety.

Safeguarding and Protection

We will continue to apply all measures to keep people safe in line with our current policies and local authority safeguarding authority procedures. We will continue to alert the local authority to any safeguarding issue and comply with our current notification requirements and procedures. We will continue to exercise our duty of candour where we have made mistakes that have caused serious harm to our residents.

Staff and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Staff should use PPE as directed in the following Public Health England/Wales/Scotland guidance and our clients Policies and Procedures.

England

- COVID-19: Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – Resource for Care Workers Working in Care Homes During Sustained COVID-19 Transmission in England

Wales

- Information for Health and Social Care Professionals (Wales)
- Guidance to Prevent COVID-19 Among Care Home Residents and Manage Cases, Incidents & Outbreaks in Residential Care Settings in Wales

Scotland

- Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Guidance in Healthcare Settings
- COVID-19 – Information and Guidance for Care Homes

We are aware that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – Resource for Care Workers Working in Care Homes During Sustained COVID-19 Transmission in England and the equivalent Wales and Scotland publications provide guidance about periods when there is considered to be “sustained transmission” of the Covid-19 virus. This covers periods when the virus is assessed to be common in the community and support staff are likely to come into contact with it during their routine work. At such times, additional safeguards are advised.

The guidance states that, during sustained transmission periods:

- staff performing a task requiring them to be within two metres of a resident, but when not delivering personal care or needing to touch them (e.g. conducting meal assistance and medicine rounds), and where there is no one within two metres who has a cough, only have to wear a type II surgical mask (a fluid-repellent mask is not needed) in addition to any PPE indicated by standard infection control precautions, if any
- staff need not wear a mask if working alone in private areas but must don a suitable mask if they leave the private work area to move through the building, e.g. on an errand, or for meal breaks – shared office spaces will be subject to specific risk assessment.

All staff will be trained in the safe use of PPE. Usage should be monitored by line managers/supervisors.

We will keep the PPE guidelines under review and complete appropriate risk assessments. We are aware that PHE recommend the general use of PPE during periods of “sustained transmission” of Covid-19 in the community regardless of whether residents have symptoms.

Staff Recruitment

We will continue to maintain our safe recruitment policies and procedures in line with its registration requirements.

Induction and Training

We will keep all risk assessments of our training arrangements under review. Assessments will include the running of induction training programmes for Care Certificate, the All Wales Health and Social Care Induction Framework or Scottish induction standards’ requirements.

Face-to-face training that is not deemed to be a priority at the current time will be cancelled or rescheduled. Where possible face-to-face training will be replaced by online “e-learning” methods wherever possible. This will include “blended” learning where theory elements are carried out online prior to attending, thus reducing the amount of face-to-face time.

Priority face-to-face training elements that cannot be replaced with online alternatives will proceed with suitable Covid-safe risk mitigation procedures in place, including:

- all attending staff to observe social distancing, and to observe hand and respiratory hygiene guidelines
- all training venues to be set up to enable social distancing, including during arrival and leaving
- all venues to be ventilated and subject to regular cleaning
- no sharing of equipment
- no staff to attend who are feeling unwell

Induction of new staff who are new to care work will still follow a Care Certificate/Wales Induction pathways but with an expectation that the usual time period, particularly for work-based assessments, might need to be extended and the programme developed more incrementally.

Induction of new staff with experience of care work will focus on ensuring they are competent to carry out their roles and tasks in the current circumstances by ensuring that they implement key policies and procedures regarding residents’ care and ensuring that it is safe and effective.

Much of the induction for any new staff will be carried out through workplace instruction, support, supervision and guidance from management and experienced staff.

Testing and Tracing

Our views Covid-19 testing as a vital element in keeping its clients, service users and staff safe during the pandemic. We will therefore take all reasonable actions to support testing and to make tests available to those that need them in line with national guidance and policies.

- Staff can book a test directly, selecting a regional test site drive-through appointment or a home test kit.

In the UK the NHS Test and Trace system is operative. It involves identifying and isolating people who are infected and then tracing those who may have been in contact with them. These people can then be tested and isolated as required.

We will fully support testing and tracing. Further information can be found from the online document, *NHS Test and Trace: How it Works*.

Travel Restrictions

Travelling is now much reduced due to countries around the world closing their borders. Latest travel advice can be found on the GOV.UK/Welsh/Scottish Government websites.

We require staff to comply with any advice given and to inform their line manager wherever the guidance may apply to them. People, including healthcare workers, are advised to stay indoors and avoid contact with other people (self-quarantine) for 10 days if they have travelled recently to the UK from specified countries.

Winter Planning

We are aware that pressures on health and social care systems are likely to increase through the winter when the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may be exacerbated by annual winter illnesses such as Norovirus and the flu. We will make all possible contingency plans to build resilience for the winter and protect our staff and residents from such pressures. In particular we will:

- support all staff to have their annual flu jab
- continue to ensure that all relevant Government guidance is implemented and followed
- ensure that both symptomatic staff and symptomatic recipients of care are able to access Covid-19 testing as soon as possible
- review and update our business continuity plans for the autumn and winter with workforce resilience a key component
- co-ordinate with local authority and NHS winter planning
- utilise additional funding available to implement infection prevention and control measures (such as the Infection Control Fund available through local authorities), obtain PPE and mitigate, where possible, winter staffing issues.

Our approach will be informed by relevant national planning.

Business Continuity Procedures and Pandemic Recovery Planning

In addition to our general business continuity and recovery planning policies, we recognise the need to have a separate pandemic recovery plan and procedure. This is because a general continuity recovery plan focuses on a short-term recovery programme. In contrast, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic could last many months.