Thank you for your efforts and compliance with the Covid guidance Aspire has sent to date. We really appreciate the professionalism and commitment our staff have shown.

We must continue to take the instructions, guidance and advice offered by the Government seriously and must not become complacent about the continued presence of this virus within our communities, and the real risk this continues to have for many of the vulnerable individuals we support and their families/carers. Individually and collectively, we need to take care of each other and those we support. If people don’t follow guidelines, they could put their families, colleagues and supported individuals at risk. We provide support to a lot of frail, vulnerable people who are at higher risk of becoming very unwell or dying. We must continue to do everything we can to avoid that.

In Scotland for the general public, all covid rules and restrictions have been lifted, **but the virus has not gone away** and infection prevention and control guidance remain in place. Everyone is urged to get their **covid vaccinations** when offered to ensure they are fully protected and to care for yourself and others to help slow down the spread of the virus and reduce pressure on our health services.

It’s strongly recommended you get vaccinated against flu and coronavirus (COVID-19) if you’re eligible this winter. This includes frontline healthcare and social care workers. You can get your winter vaccines now by:

* [booking an appointment online](https://vacs.nhs.scot/csp)
* phoning the national vaccination helpline on 0800 030 8013
* visiting a [drop-in clinic](https://www.nhsinform.scot/covid-19-vaccine/local-health-board-vaccination-information) – you can visit a drop-in clinic in your local area, or attend one that’s convenient for you either where you work or visit regularly

You can get the vaccines you’re eligible for until 31 March 2024.

Following [advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-spring-2024-and-future-vaccination-programmes-jcvi-advice-4-december-2023/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-in-spring-2024-and-considerations-on-future-covid-19-vaccination-4-december-2023), NHS Scotland is working to finalise plans for the roll out of Scotland’s spring coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination programme.

Respiratory infections including COVID-19 can spread more in indoor places. It is important that we keep doing the things that keep us all well.

To protect yourself and keep others well:

* if you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, try to stay at home and avoid contact with others – if you do need to go out, wear a well-fitting face covering
* get the vaccine if offered to give you the best possible protection
* follow the [NHS guidance if you are feeling unwell](https://www.nhsinform.scot/winter-illness/) – and know how to [get the right care in the right place](https://www.nhsinform.scot/right-care)
* socialise in well-ventilated spaces where possible
* give more space and care around those using the [Distance Aware](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-distance-aware-scheme/) scheme (wearing a badge or lanyard)
* consider how many people are gathered in spaces and try to avoid overcrowded areas
* wash your hands and clean surfaces regularly
* look out for spaces that display [Stay Well Signage](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/pages/signage-scheme/) to let you know what measures they are taking to make spaces safer for all

Everyone is urged to stay at home and avoid contact with other people if they are unwell with symptoms of a respiratory infection and have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities.

**Symptoms**

It is important for staff to be aware of any changes in symptoms for those who they provide care and/or support to. Staff should be vigilant for Covid symptoms and report to their manager at the earliest stage.

Symptoms of coronavirus, flu and common respiratory infections include:

* continuous cough
* high temperature, fever or chills
* loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell
* shortness of breath
* unexplained tiredness, lack of energy
* muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise
* not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry
* headache that's unusual or longer lasting than usual
* sore throat, stuffy or runny nose
* diarrhoea
* feeling sick or being sick

Older adults may experience:

* lethargy/fatigue
* reduced appetite/fluid intake
* loose stools, nausea, abdominal pain
* headache, new aches and pains
* change in behaviour, particularly for those living with dementia

**Infection prevention and control**

Effective infection prevention and control (IPC) remains an important line of defence against infectious diseases.

Staff must continue to use personal protective equipment (PPE) for activities that bring them into close personal contact, such as washing and bathing, personal hygiene and contact with bodily fluids.

New personal protective equipment must be used for each episode of care.

Guidance on face masks:

* staff providing direct care do not need to routinely wear a face mask at all times during their shift
* staff in non-direct care roles (e.g. catering, domestic or office staff) do not need to routinely wear a face covering in communal areas
* visitors to adult care homes do not need to wear a mask or face covering including in communal areas
* staff and visitors may choose to wear a mask, and this should be supported
* while receiving care and support, individuals (or their representatives where relevant) may wish a member of staff to wear a mask. If so, this should be supported by staff and be recorded in care or support plans

**Testing**

Clinical advice on a four UK nation basis is that remaining asymptomatic testing in social care can now be paused. Symptomatic testing will continue for staff providing close personal care and support.

Individuals who are eligible for coronavirus treatments can access free tests if they have symptoms and should keep a pack of lateral flow device (LFD) tests at home.

Individuals can [order a free pack for home delivery online](https://nhsscot.service-now.com/covid_lateral_flow_test_order_results) or by phoning 0800 008 6587.

**Self-isolation**

It remains important that all those who test positive for COVID-19 follow guidance to self-isolate.

**Aspire staff must continue to follow infection control and prevention guidance and are responsible for remaining aware of the most current advice and guidance available, minimising risk to themselves, their families, and the people we support.** Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

To prevent becoming infected, frequently wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. Use alcohol sanitisers with at least 60% alcohol only if handwashing facilities are not available. Dry your hands completely with a disposable towel. Use the disposable towel to turn off the tap.

Wash your hands frequently and after:

* taking public transport
* before leaving home and arriving home
* on arrival and on leaving each work environment
* after using the toilet
* before food preparation
* before eating any food, including snacks
* after using supermarket trolleys etc. (clean trolleys before use if possible)
* after breaks and personal activities

We must all remain vigilant in ensuring that no action or omission on our part gives the virus a chance to spread.

Please contact the HR department if you have concerns re income and sickness support. As employee owners, this is your company. We all need to do the right thing by the company to ensure it remains financially viable and support genuine staff need. We do not intend to support anyone who may see an opportunity to take advantage this current situation. Some decisions will be determined at the manager’s discretion. Any such situations will be equally considered with all relevant information to ensure fairness for all staff.

Please download and utilise the Health Assured App which has lots of helpful information and programs for you to follow to assist in your physical, mental health and wellbeing: <https://healthassuredeap.co.uk/home>

Username: Aspire

Password: Housing

Please provide your manager with updates on your vaccination status and continue to keep yourself and others safe and well.

Thank you