



 <p>Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru Public Health Wales</p>	<p><b>Name of Meeting</b> Quality, Safety and Improvement Committee</p> <p><b>Date of Meeting</b> 12 October 2023</p> <p><b>Agenda item:</b> 5.3</p>
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<h2 style="text-align: center;">Winter Planning 2023/24</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center;">Health Protection and Infection Services</h3>	
<p><b>Executive lead:</b></p>	<p>Professor Fu-Meng Khaw; National Director Health Protection and Screening Services and Executive Medical Director</p>
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<p><b>Approval/Scrutiny route:</b></p>	<p>Health Protection and Screening Services Directorate Leadership Team</p>
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<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>To provide a summary briefing on planning, preparation and progress for Winter 2023/24 from a Health Protection and Microbiology service perspective.</p>
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<p><b>Recommendation:</b></p>				
<p style="text-align: center;">APPROVE <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CONSIDER <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">RECOMMEND <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ADOPT <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ASSURANCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take <b>assurance</b> from the update on planning, preparation and progress for Health Protection and Microbiology Services for Winter 2023/24</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Link to Public Health Wales <a href="#">Strategic Plan</a></b></p>				

Public Health Wales has an agreed strategic plan, which has identified seven strategic priorities and well-being objectives.

This report contributes to the following:

<b>Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective</b>	5 - Protecting the public from infection and environmental threats to health
<b>Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective</b>	Choose an item.
<b>Strategic Priority/Well-being Objective</b>	Choose an item.

### Summary impact analysis

<b>Equality and Health Impact Assessment</b>	An Equality and Health Impact Assessment is not required
<b>Risk and Assurance</b>	This paper relates to Risk 1 on the Strategic Risk Register.
<b>Health and Care Standards</b>	This report supports and/or takes into account the <a href="#">Health and Care Standards for NHS Wales</a> Quality Themes  Theme 1 - Staying Healthy Theme 2 - Safe Care Theme 7 - Staff and Resources
<b>Financial implications</b>	Addressed within the overall budget process for the Health Protection and Screening Services Directorate.
<b>People implications</b>	Addressed within the overall workforce plans for Health Protection and Microbiology including the Health Protection Business Case process.

## **1. Purpose / situation**

Over the last few months our teams have been actively engaged in providing advice to Welsh Government, NHS Wales and other partners in relation to planning for the winter of 2023/24.

The winter of 2023/24 will again present a number of challenges in relation to the delivery of health protection and microbiology services, which require consideration in relation to the ongoing prevention, management and response to infection, communicable disease and environmental hazard response.

This paper provides an update briefing on the relevant aspects of planning, response, priorities and progress for Health Protection and Microbiology services.

## **2. Background**

Public Health Wales has an important system leadership and service delivery role as we approach the winter of 2023/24. Over the last few months, Health Protection and Microbiology divisions have continued to provide acute response in relation to the prevention and management of Acute Respiratory Infections and the control of other infectious disease/environmental hazards.

In addition, they have provided a range of support to Welsh Government and partners in developing a planned approach to Winter 2023/24.

This has specifically included involvement in:

- Welsh Government System Resilience Monitoring and Intelligence Group
- Provision of advice to Welsh Government to inform a letter to NHS Wales reinforcing the importance of robust infection, prevention, and control measures.
- Provision of advice to Welsh Government to inform their acute respiratory infections' testing strategy (including COVID) for the winter.
- Provision of Public Health Advice Notes to Welsh Government on new Covid Variant (BA.2.86 (V-23AUG-01) and Health Protection (Notifications) Regulations for consideration as part of policy making.
- Supporting WG in their assessment and review of the regional Health Protection Plans.

- Development of a reporting template that WG can use in their quarterly monitoring of regional health protection plans.
- A review of the winter respiratory infections SOP that outlines the way PHW works with partners in response, followed by a training event (webinar) for partners, including care homes managers.

### **3. Description/Assessment**

#### **3.1 Assessment of Health Protection Threats - Winter 2023/24**

The main threats are likely to be the usual seasonal infections –influenza and Human Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) – with the addition of COVID-19. The relative timing of each cannot be predicted, but there are some impact projections from Welsh Government based on different scenarios. The early RSV seasonal activity in 2022/23 has not been replicated this year so we are likely to see a season in November or December. The timing and severity of influenza is also uncertain, and the experience of the southern hemisphere is not necessarily predictive of these factors.

It is deemed unlikely that scarlet fever will increase to the same extent as in the 2022/23 season, partly as this increase was related to communications that changed health seeking and reporting behaviours. However, invasive group A streptococcal infections remain at higher levels than the usual seasonal baseline and may increase again over the winter and spring.

Other infections such as invasive meningococcal and pneumococcal disease are likely to increase over the winter and may cause hospital admissions and clusters of cases. Additionally, highly transmissible infections like norovirus may also add to pressures, particularly in closed settings and hospitals. The combination of hospital transmission of norovirus, influenza and COVID-19 can add significant pressure to the acute sector, due to slowing of patient movement and limitation of bed usage.

#### **3.2 Health Protection and Infection Services Response**

PHW Health Protection and Infection services have been undertaken a range of activity to plan our winter service response.

Our activity is now being framed within the context of the published Welsh Government plans. These include:

1. Public Health Respiratory Framework 2023 to 2024
2. Guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19

### 3. Winter respiratory vaccination programme 2023 to 2024 (WHC/2023/029)

An update on the key PHW Health Protection and Microbiology activity is summarised below:

#### **a) Health Protection Response**

Health protection is one of the statutory responsibilities of PHW. This service is delivered on a 24 x 7 basis throughout the year. The service is organised broadly under the following functional areas which continue to function during winter. In addition to business as usual, the Health Protection Service:

- Have established a PHW internal Health Protection Forum (HPF) to consider emerging evidence, ongoing incidents & outbreaks that allows for a rapid risk assessment and timely response at an organisational level.
- Continue to strengthen our genomic epidemiology capability to better detect links between cases in routine work. This including detection of new SARS CoV-2 variants.

#### **Acute Response**

- Protecting the population from infection and environmental hazards through provision of expert health protection advice.
- System wide support to health boards and trusts, local authorities, emergency services, other partners and professionals.
- Routine planned and unplanned day to day response to cases, incidents, and outbreaks of communicable disease.

#### **Routine Surveillance**

- Development and maintenance of surveillance systems including active, passive, and sentinel surveillance, and include regularly assessing the quality of surveillance data.

#### **Field Epidemiology and Outbreak Management**

- Investigations in response to urgent health protection issues to guide, as quickly as possible, the processes of selecting and implementing interventions to reduce or prevent illness and death.

#### **Proactive Partnership working and Collaboration.**

- Ongoing support across the health protection system, building on the learning from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Undertaken specific work with partners for example, in relation to the operating arrangements for response to communicable disease during these winter months.

## **b) Vaccination**

The Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme (VPDP) continue to support the system to deliver the vaccination programmes.

### **COVID-19**

For the Autumn/Winter of 2023 the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) has advised that COVID-19 vaccination be focussed on those at greatest risk of serious disease and who are therefore most likely to benefit from vaccination. As age, problems with the immune system and co-morbidities remain the most important risk factors for severe outcomes, the COVID-19 vaccines will be offered to:

- residents in a care home for older adults
- all adults aged 65 years and over
- persons aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group
- frontline health and social care workers
- persons aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression
- persons aged 16 to 64 years who are carers and staff working in care homes for older adults

### **Flu**

Flu vaccination will be offered free on the NHS in Wales to:

- children aged two and three years on 31 August 2023
- children in primary school from reception class to year 6 (inclusive)
- children in secondary school from year 7 to year 11 (inclusive)
- people aged six months to 64 years in clinical risk groups
- people aged 65 years and older (age on 31 March 2024)
- all adult residents in Welsh prisons residents
- pregnant women
- carers
- people with a learning disability
- staff in nursing homes and care homes with regular client contact
- staff providing domiciliary care
- staff providing frontline NHS/Primary care services
- healthcare workers (including healthcare students) with direct patient contact

## Communications

The Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme (VPDP) is also responsible for the commissioning of a media campaign which runs from October to December aimed at promoting the COVID-19 and Influenza vaccines as part of preparing for winter.

For 2023/4 the annual campaign has a budget of approximately £180,000 and will be focussed on the message that getting vaccinated is like “putting on your winter coat” and getting “an extra layer of protection against serious illness”.

Over the last 2 years the annual campaign has moved from a mass communication approach (e.g.TV and radio) to a targeted approach. This year the priority audiences were:

### COVID-19 vaccine

- People aged 6 months to 64 at risk
- Carers and frontline NHS staff
- Pregnant women

### Flu vaccine

- People aged 6 months to 64 years of age in a clinical risk group.
- Primary school and secondary school aged children – up until, and including, year 11.
- Parents of 2- and 3-year-old children
- Carers and frontline NHS staff
- Pregnant women
- 50–64-year-olds

With a particular focus on targeting our campaign activity so that it reaches and engages people from the three lower socio-economic groups (C2DE) and from ethnic minority communities, where we know vaccine uptake is lower.

The campaign was launched on September 11 and received good news coverage of the initial press release which focussed on flu vaccination in those aged 2 and 3 years old.

In response to the threat posed by the B.2.86 variant, Public Health Wales provided advice to Welsh Government on the prioritisation of vaccination for those in the most vulnerable groups early in the autumn vaccination campaign. This differed from the previous JCVI advice to

vaccinate as close to the wave of winter transmission as possible and reflected concern that a BA.2.86 wave may come earlier in the season. As a result, local health boards have predominantly started their vaccination campaign in care homes. As of 25 September, over 50% of care home residents have now been vaccinated.

With new formulations of vaccine being introduced in October, VPDP has been supporting the service with provision of training materials and other enabling resources to rapidly deploy the latest vaccines on delivery.

As of 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023, a total of 42,244 autumn COVID-19 booster vaccinations had been given in Wales; Uptake is 3.8% in those aged 65y and older, and 55.7% in those living in residential care homes for older adults. See full vaccine surveillance report at:

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/>

### **c) Integrated Surveillance**

Surveillance of vaccine preventable diseases such as influenza, Covid 19 and other acute respiratory diseases is ongoing with a large expansion of the sentinel surveillance network to include those seeking care in community pharmacies. These developments will support a better understanding of the transmission of respiratory diseases in the community and their impact in health care settings. The network is already providing important information about symptomatic RSV, flu and COVID-19 in the community, and provides key information to estimate the effectiveness of vaccines against respiratory infections.

Sentinel hospitals are reporting on severe acute respiratory infections to add to understanding of the more severe cases. Data from these systems will be used to contribute to four nations work on assessment of influenza vaccine effectiveness.

CDSC continue the monitoring of circulating variants, mainly based on sequencing of hospitalised cases. Residential care home incidents are reported in our weekly slides, and we are working to improve reporting of associated hospital admissions.

### **d) Infection Services including Testing.**

In addition to advice to Welsh Government on the configuration of clinical and diagnostic infection services, the Infection Division delivers clinical infection management and advice locally to Health Boards, local Infection Control advice and leadership, plus diagnostic services across Wales.

Infection Services are specifically developing diagnostic services to support Health Boards and Welsh Government over the winter period.

The current strategy for respiratory viral testing is focused on testing symptomatic individuals to support NHS clinical care – diagnosing those who are infected so that clinical judgments can be made to ensure the best care. In addition, a number of sentinel surveillance schemes across primary and secondary care are supported.

Testing for these purposes is delivered through a combination of low throughput rapid single-plex and multiplex platforms and medium throughput platforms. A new medium throughput multiplex platform that will reduce financial pressures will go-live in October 2023.

The service maintains the potential capability for high-throughput testing for SARS-CoV-2, Influenza and RSV, if the situation requires.

The service has expanded the repertoire of rapid molecular testing in the 'Hot Labs' and general laboratories from respiratory viral testing to include tests for *C. difficile*, norovirus, MRSA, CPO (Carbapenem-Producing Organism). These tests have now been rolled-out to all acute hospitals in Wales to enable rapid identification and thereby control of these infection control issues, and support Hospitals in managing their patient flows over the winter period.

There is an on-going roll-out of de-centralised blood culture processing, combined with rapid identification of positive cultures. This will improve sepsis diagnostics and management and support improved hospital patient flow.

#### **e) Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)**

The HARP team will continue with their support of Health Boards and Trusts and have provided advice to WG to inform system wide letters from WG to NHS Wales organisations in relation to the importance of IPC this winter.

#### **f) Communicable Disease Outbreak Control Plan for Wales.**

At the request of Welsh Government, Public Health Wales is facilitating the multi-agency review of this plan. This work is scheduled to be completed by the end of the calendar year, with an exercise to test the revised plan in March 2024. The current plan remains 'Fit for Purpose' and will continue to be used until the revised plan is approved and communicated by the Chief Medical Officer.

## **g) Environmental Public Health**

Environmental Public Health continues to guide on the issuing of appropriate public health messaging during extreme weather events as well as working with CDSC to conduct surveillance of cold weather health effects. In the longer term it is hoped that these data will support the identification of public health actions and interventions that will reduce cold weather burden on health and health services.

## **h) Communications**

The Public Health Wales Communications Team is working in partnership with the Welsh Government and other internal teams to prepare for the winter and to align messaging across the system. A key focus will be in continuing to promote the Flu and Covid vaccinations with the recently launched 'Put On Your Winter Coat' campaign, utilising targeted digital advertising to encourage uptake, and to inform eligible groups when, where and how they can access vaccinations. A separate national campaign, launching in November, will promote other behaviours that can protect against winter illnesses, with a particular focus on handwashing. Public Health Wales will also continue to support the Welsh Government's 'Help Us Help You' campaign, as well as delivering campaigns on other key health topics over the winter, including HPV vaccination, Antimicrobial Awareness, HIV testing, cervical screening, and mental wellbeing. The Public Health Wales communications team will also continue to support the Health Protection response to clusters, incidents, and outbreaks of winter-associated communicable diseases through the Wales Outbreak Plan and the Respiratory Virus Risk Communications Plan.

## **i) Business Continuity (Potential Industrial Action)**

The Emergency Preparedness Resilience & Response (EPRR) Team Public Health Wales (PHW) has been monitoring the situation regarding industrial action from a range of differing sectors – with a specific focus on the potential for disruption to service delivery at PHW.

With a specific focus on unions impacting NHS Wales, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and the Society of Radiographers (SoR) have collectively agreed a pay settlement which has moved them out of dispute with Welsh Government, but negotiations are ongoing regarding non-pay elements and the cost of living.

However, the [British Medical Association \(Wales\) membership has rejected the offers](#) made by employers and are moving to industrial

action ballot. If the balloting results in a mandate to strike, Welsh Government advise that there would be the potential for industrial action involving Consultants and Junior Doctors between 4-6 weeks post-ballot closure, with notice in advance.

Noting the potential, an extraordinary meeting of the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Group will be convened. Its purpose will be to share information, assess the situation, consider potential impacts for PHW and outline what needs to be done to minimise disruption to service in the event BMA (Wales) industrial action.

### 3.1 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015



The PHW work on winter planning is seeking to address emerging pressures for this winter, but also to contribute to longer term NHS planning in relation to responding to surges in demand.



The PHW work on winter planning has a key focus on preventing the impacts from the spread of communicable diseases across Wales



The PHW service response to winter is integrated both within the Health Protection and Screening Services Directorate and also across PHW and wider system partners, notably NHS Wales and Local Authorities PHW is working closely in collaboration with WG and other system partners in planning the winter response



PHW engagement with system partners and the wider public (e.g., through the Time to Talk surveys) will ensure involvement to inform response.

#### 4. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to:

- Take **assurance** from the update on planning, preparation and progress for Health Protection and Microbiology Services for Winter 2023/24