

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Professor Sir Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 20/2022

FOR ACTION

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward distribution to practice staff)
OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 20/2022

Date: 11 May 2022

Dear Colleague

COVID-19 TREATMENTS FOR NON-HOSPITALISED PATIENTS

We wanted to take the opportunity, five months since the Outpatient Covid-19 Treatment Service (OCTs) was established across Northern Ireland (NI), to thank you for the contribution from general practice in supporting patients at highest risk of deterioration from COVID-19 infection to access new COVID-19 treatments.

OCTs have treated over 3,000 patients to date and have assessed many more. During this short period there have been many policy and guidance changes; to the testing regime, introduction of new treatments, withdrawal of other treatments in response to emerging evidence and changes in the course of the pandemic. It is an incredible achievement that HSC NI has been able to adapt and respond to these changes alongside other clinical and operational pressures. This would not be possible without the support and collaborative working of general practice colleagues with HSC trusts.

The pandemic has been an evolving situation and we would also like to take this opportunity to provide an update on the COVID-19 treatment service.

Treatments

There are currently four COVID-19 treatments available within the UK [clinical commissioning policy](#):

- nMAB treatment [Sotrovimab](#)
- Antiviral [Paxlovid](#) (may be known as nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir)
- Antiviral [Remdesivir \(Veklury\)](#)
- Antiviral [molnupiravir \(Lagevrio\)](#)

Eligibility criteria

Non-hospitalised patients are eligible for treatment with any one of the four medicines if:

- SARS-CoV-2 infection is confirmed by either:
 - o Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing OR
 - o Lateral flow test (registered via gov.uk or NHS 119)

AND

- Symptomatic with COVID-19¹ and showing no signs of clinical recovery

AND

- The patient is a member of a **'highest' risk group** (as defined in the [interim clinical commissioning policy](#))

Treatment can be commenced within 5-7 days of symptom onset (see [interim clinical commissioning policy](#) for further information).

Please continue to follow the referral process and the method to seek advice from OCTs clinicians as outlined in previous communication by the Strategic Planning and Policy Group (SPPG).

Testing

The [announcement](#) in relation to the continuation of free of charge lateral flow device (LFD) testing for the highest risk cohort reiterates the importance of the continued treatment offer for this patient group.

It is strongly recommend that everyone who is in a group who may be eligible for a COVID-19 treatment should obtain rapid lateral flow tests to keep at home in case they become symptomatic. Lateral flow tests are available from most community pharmacies in NI. In addition they can be ordered [online](#) for free delivery to patients homes or by calling 119.

Further testing advice for this highest risk group, including how to test and reporting the result, is available on [NI Direct Treatments for coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#). This website will be kept up to date with current advice.

¹ The clinical commissioning policy for COVID-19 treatments includes the following as symptoms of COVID-19: feverish, chills, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache, red or watery eyes, body aches, loss of taste or smell, fatigue, loss of appetite, confusion, dizziness, pressure or tight chest, chest pain, stomach ache, rash, sneezing, sputum or phlegm, runny nose

Digital Identification of patients

Patients having been identified previously as being in the 'Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV)' group are not automatically eligible for COVID-19 treatment, as defined in the [clinical commissioning policy](#). Currently we identify those at highest risk and eligible for COVID-19 treatments by a digital method, utilising data from GP systems as well as trust databases. This identification is reliant on accurate coding of health conditions and medication prescribed across HSC. The use of data in this way highlights the importance of good record keeping in general practice, as well as across our healthcare system to support patient care.

Access to treatments for NI patients travelling within the UK

Since April 2022, OCTs clinicians have had a mechanism to provide direct referral to an equivalent service in England, Scotland and Wales to ensure timely access to COVID-19 treatments for eligible NI patients travelling throughout the UK who test positive for COVID-19.

PANORAMIC study

The PANORAMIC study has now recruited over 25,000 participants since opening on 8 December 2021, with over 1000 participants from NI. Recruitment for the antiviral Molnupiravir arm of the study closed on 27 April.

An additional antiviral, Paxlovid, is now being investigated in the study. Recruitment to the Paxlovid arm initially began, on 12 April in England only.

The Department of Health and Social Care is working with the PANORAMIC study team to develop plans for how Paxlovid could potentially become available through the study in NI in due course. Any updates will be communicated to general practice.

COVID-19 rapid guideline: Managing COVID-19

We would like to remind GPs and GP OOHs of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE guideline 191) [COVID-19 rapid guideline: Managing COVID-19](#). Please ensure you are familiar with this guideline that covers the management of COVID-19 for children, young people and adults in all care settings. It brings together existing recommendations on managing COVID-19, new recommendations on therapeutics and is continually updated as new information emerges,

Finally, thank you again for your ongoing support managing patients with COVID-19 in the community.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Medical Officer



MRS CATHY HARRISON
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

