

Key Points for Messaging

COVID 19 Positive Test Results

General messaging within the affected area:

- Timely, clear and detailed information for supported individuals, staff and family members is essential. Provide all parties with all of the necessary information and make senior staff available for any questions or concerns. Consider use of a pre-determined, visual fan out communication strategy so you get the message out quickly. Identify the people responsible and be aware that timely communication requires after hours work.
- Prior to any positive cases within an organization, it is essential that all staff are made aware of the fact that they can't make use of unofficial media, such as Facebook and What's App, to relay information. This will hopefully prevent staff from sharing unauthorized information about anyone testing positive for the virus.
- It is also extremely helpful to communicate the agency strategy in responding to a positive case, prior to any such event, so that staff and family are already aware of the steps that will be taken.
- Reassure that this is not a panic situation and that it is a relatively isolated occurrence. Point out that the staff team was ready to address the issue.
- Although the rate of positive COVID 19 test results, within agencies supporting people with an intellectual disability, is low, it was expected that eventually a staff person or supported individual would end up with the virus. Agencies have implemented a wide and thorough set of COVID 19 policies and procedures aimed at preventing the spread of the virus and this has led to low rates of the virus within service providers. Staff wear masks at all times while working, they also sometimes wear face shields, they wash their hands frequently, make good use of hand sanitizers and there are extensive disinfecting protocols in place.
- Wherever possible, state that all Public Health protocols were followed as soon as the individual began to experience symptoms. Outline all the steps that were taken in meeting protocols. Clarify with Public Health what they believe is the infectious period before communicating with others.
- Where an outbreak will be publicly declared, Public Health will delay their release of this information until all internal stakeholders are informed.

Staging Your Communication Plan:

1. Message to staff working in the affected area:

- Begin with staff so they are able to answer any questions that may come from families or supported individuals.
- Managers to speak with staff within the affected area and provide specific information.
- Ask how they are feeling and emphasize the importance of self-monitoring, not coming to work if ill and getting tested if experiencing symptoms.

- Let them know that if they have been in close contact with the infected person that they will be contacted by their manager.
- Assure staff that you are following all public health and program protocols to mitigate the spread.

2. Message to family members whose loved one is within the affected area:

- Informing staff and then family members first then allows them to prepare for informing supported individuals.
- Senior staff to notify family members of people who live or work within the affected area.
- Acknowledge that this is incredibly upsetting.
- Let them know their loved one is not showing symptoms. Their health is monitored closely (list steps taken to monitor) and if they begin to show symptoms they will be notified and you will arrange for testing. Set up specific steps to keep them updated on their family member's condition.
- Let family know that they will be contacted if their family member has been in close contact with the positive person and will be tested if directed to do so by Public Health.
- Everyone in the affected area is being isolated. If the positive person is a staff person indicate that they are not working and will remain in isolation until cleared by a positive test and/or Public Health. If the positive person is a supported individual indicate the steps taken to isolate them.
- Outline all steps being taken to prevent any spread of the virus.

3. Message to any supported individuals who are living within the affected area:

- It is helpful to develop plain language scripts for providing information to supported individuals.
- Managers to speak with supported individuals within the affected area and provide specific information.
- Acknowledge that this may be very upsetting and that the routines in their home are going to look really different for some time, if the positive person is remaining in the home.
- If the person, who tests positive, is within a day service then people need to know the individual will not be at the day service for some time.
- Explain the PPE that staff will be wearing and why they will be wearing it.
- Review all the protocols that will need to be put in place.
- Assure them that you will do everything to make sure that everyone remains safe and to stop the spread of the virus.

- **Once everyone is contacted for the affected area, then a more general message needs to be given to all staff and family members within the same service and then within the entire organization.**