Removal of COVID-19 restrictions
Guidance for Volunteering in NHSScotland

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Contents

1.   Introduction

This guidance provides the latest information and advice to support safe volunteering across NHSScotland and is intended for use by staff working in volunteer management.

Volunteering has an important role to play across NHSScotland but the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the levels of volunteering activity.

The National Group for Volunteering in NHSScotland continues to encourage NHS boards to remobilise their volunteering activity, across all volunteer groups.

It is the responsibility of each NHS board to implement appropriate actions and to ensure that their duty of care towards patients, staff and volunteers is adhered to, in line with the current Scottish Government advice. This states that:

'All covid rules and restrictions have been lifted in Scotland, but the virus has not gone away. Use 'covid sense' to help protect yourself and others:

- *get your vaccine when offered to ensure you are fully protected*
- *stay at home if you're unwell with symptoms or have a fever*
- *open windows when socialising indoors*
- *wear a face covering in indoor public places and on public transport*
- *wash your hands to protect yourself*

Care for yourself and others to help slow down the spread of the virus and reduce pressure on our health services.'

2.   Changes to Restrictions in Health & Social Care Settings

The following updated advice around face coverings and social distancing is relevant to consider when deploying volunteers in health and social care setting and should be adhered to.

[Coronavirus (COVID-19): extended use of face masks and face coverings in hospitals, primary care and wider community healthcare](#) (updated 14 April 2022) states 'As face coverings guidance in wider public settings in Scotland gradually stands down, certain settings remain where the extended use of facemasks and/or face coverings will still be necessary. In settings such as hospitals, primary care and within wider community healthcare, the wearing and the extended use of Fluid Resistant (Type IIR) Surgical Masks (FRSM)will still be required for healthcare workers, patients and patient visitors. This is due

to these settings hosting more clinically vulnerable individuals, for whom COVID-19 infection still poses a greater risk'.

Face coverings exemption cards were launched by the Scottish Government on 29 October 2020 to support people who are unable to wear a face covering for health conditions, disabilities or special reasons. Any consideration of this should be part of a risk assessment process.

On 31 March 2022, NHS Boards were informed of the 'De-escalation of COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Measures in Health and Social Care Settings to alleviate System Pressures'.

The key changes relevant to this policy are 'removal of two metre physical distancing across all health and care settings'.

Further advice on workplace and individual COVID-19 risk assessments can be found here:

Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer businesses and workplaces (updated 10 May 2022), provides general advice for businesses and workplaces on reducing the risk of COVID-19 and supporting staff and customers

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on individual occupational risk assessment

2.1   Vaccination of volunteers

All volunteers are advised to take the COVID-19 vaccine and subsequent booster vaccine to reduce the likelihood of severe disease.

The vaccination status of volunteers should not be a determining factor in a volunteer's suitability to volunteer, but may form part of the individual risk assessment process.

2.2   Coronavirus testing for volunteers

Scottish Government published guidance on coronavirus testing, updated 18 April 2022, and explains that testing in Scotland is changing, thanks to our widespread vaccination coverage and access to new COVID-19 treatments.

Testing is only available to people with symptoms of COVID-19, and in a limited number of other circumstances.

Volunteers should get a PCR test if they have symptoms of COVID-19, or are unvaccinated and have been identified as a close contact by contact tracers.

2.3   Lateral flow testing for volunteers

Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested in Scotland (updated 18 April 2022) states that 'Most people no longer need to test regularly if they don't have COVID-19 symptoms.

Lateral flow device (LFD) tests remain available to a limited group of people in Scotland. You can order LFDs if you are:

- a fully-vaccinated close contact of a positive case
- self-isolating – you can end self-isolation early by testing negative on day 6 and 7. Read more on NHS Inform: ending self isolation early
- visiting a hospital or care home (including volunteers carrying out their duties)
- an unpaid carer
- eligible for COVID-19 treatments

If a volunteer tests positive they follow the [current guidance published on NHS Inform](#) and inform their volunteer manager.

3.   Volunteering roles

The delivery of health and care services has changed significantly during the course of the pandemic. NHS boards may wish to undertake a review of their volunteering programmes and take forward any good practice or learning gathered.

It is possible that roles which existed for volunteers pre-pandemic may no longer be required, or will require to be adapted to fit with new guidance or models of care. In addition, the need for new roles may have arisen during the course of the pandemic.

The Volunteering in NHSScotland Programme recommends the **developing volunteering toolkit and checklist** is used in role development in NHS boards and healthcare settings. The checklist is an integral part of the [Developing Volunteering Toolkit.](#)

An editable version of the developing volunteer checklist is available from the Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) website at [www.hisengage.scot/COVID-volunteering](#). The checklist should be used in conjunction with the guidance in section 5 on risk assessment of volunteer roles.

4.   Risk assessment

NHS boards have a duty of care to their volunteers under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Existing volunteer role risk assessments will be indicative of actions necessary in certain environments. The National Group for Volunteering in NHSScotland recommends that:

- Risk assessments for volunteering programmes and roles should be regularly reviewed and updated accordingly.

- NHS boards should consider implementing a risk assessment process for individuals in addition to existing risk assessments for programmes / services / roles.

3.1. COVID-19 Age Tool

The Covid-19 age tool is no longer in use.

Scottish Government communicated with Human Resource Directors, Chairs, Chief Executives and other senior colleagues across NHSScotland on 25th May 2022 advising them that: 'As we move through the Transition Plan it is apparent that the individual Covid-19 occupational risk assessment guidance and tool are not aligned with current Scottish Government advice and guidance. Legal requirements in relation to COVID-19 have been removed and, as of the 31 May 2022, the Highest Risk List will end.

Furthermore, the guidance/tool did not account for the impact of vaccines and natural infection on personal risk. As such, we have removed the use of the tool from our Scottish Government webpage and instead have retained some useful information on the safer workplaces and public settings webpage'.

5.   Re-introduction of 'stood down' volunteers

Many existing volunteers have been, 'stood down', from their roles for more than two years. Care should be taken to consider the support and training needs of this group of volunteers. Many changes are likely to have taken place which will impact on how volunteering can be carried out safely.

Good communication and enhanced support for volunteers returning to a 'stood down' role is paramount, as some volunteers may experience worry and anxiety about returning to a healthcare environment to carry out their role.

Some volunteers may choose not to return to their role. NHS boards and volunteer managers should handle such conversations sensitively and ensure that volunteers are thanked for their contributions.

6.   Recruitment of new volunteers

It is possible that a proportion of previously engaged volunteers may not return to their previous roles, and as a result NHS boards may require to recruit new volunteers.

A key component of volunteer management is the recruitment process. Included within it are a number of steps to assess the suitability of the volunteer for the role, to check their identity and carry out necessary safeguarding checks.

6.1. Volunteer interviews

Meeting a prospective volunteer and the interview process is an important part of recruiting the right person to the right role.

NHS boards may wish to continue utilising alternatives to traditional interviewing practices such as online interviews.

6.2. Pre-volunteering checks

NHS boards are now expected to return to complying with the Safer Pre and Post Employment Checks PIN Policy. This policy covers aspects of the recruitment process including ID verification, referencing, Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) screening and occupational health clearance.

7.   National Volunteer Co-ordination Hub (NVC Hub)

The NVC Hub is currently only supporting TSi's and Local Authorities with Ukrainian refugees arriving into Scotland. The NVC Hub may be remobilised to support the supply of volunteers into heath settings should a future emergency arise.

8.   Supporting volunteers

The pandemic may have long lasting effects on the mental health and wellbeing of the population. While volunteering can reduce social isolation, improve social connections and confidence, it is important to remain mindful of volunteers mental health and wellbeing. NHS boards may wish to consider:

• Providing volunteer access to employee helpline/counselling services.
• Signposting to mental wellbeing resources, such as:

- o [Clear Your Head](#)
- o [Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)](#)
- o [Breathing Space](#)
- o [Samaritans](#)

NHS boards should also communicate the same information to third sector agencies engaged in delivering services in NHSScotland settings or on behalf of the NHS Board.

9.   Recognising volunteers

The contribution of volunteers right across society should not go unrecognised and this is especially important now. The National Group for Volunteering in NHSScotland encourages all NHS boards to recognise the contribution of volunteers by engaging in [Volunteers Week](#) activity and saying thank you to those who give the gift of time to support NHSScotland.

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