

Opportunity to participate in a research study to shape care home testing policy 'VIVALDI-CT'

Aim of the research

The aim of VIVALDI-CT is to get a complete picture of the pros and cons of regularly testing care home staff for COVID-19. We want to work with providers, staff, families, and relatives and to use our research to help policymakers decide when and if COVID-19 testing should be used in the future.

Background

At the start of the pandemic, testing was critical to prevent outbreaks and severe illness. But now most people are vaccinated and/or have been infected, the risks of severe illness are much lower. Asymptomatic testing might prevent outbreaks, but it also has negative consequences. For example, it can increase the number of staff who are off sick and close homes with outbreaks to new admissions. These harms have not previously been measured, which means they are not very visible to policymakers.

Who is doing the study?

The study is led by the team from UCL that did the national COVID-19 in care homes study (VIVALDI). It is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the UK Health Security Agency.

What does the study involve?

We aim to recruit 280 care homes to take part. Half of the homes will be randomly allocated to a 'new testing approach', and the other half will adopt the testing policy that is in place nationally when we do the trial. Every staff member in homes with the 'new testing approach' will have the option to get tested but they don't have to join in if they don't want to.

Details of the 'new testing approach' will be agreed with providers and care home staff in the first few weeks of the study. It is likely to include twice weekly testing with LFDs for staff plus support payments for those who test positive (so they are not disadvantaged by participating in the trial). Providers will also

receive funding to cover agency staff who are employed as a direct result of participation in the trial.

We understand that providers will be concerned that increased testing could increase care home closures. To reduce this risk, we have agreed with the UKHSA that asymptomatic cases detected through the trial will be excluded when homes report the number of COVID cases to their local health protection teams.

Importantly, care homes in the trial would still be expected to follow national policy for symptomatic cases in staff and residents and to conduct outbreak testing if required.

When will the study start? Can any provider take part?

We want to start the trial this winter. We are therefore looking to work with large/medium providers (10+ care homes) of care to older adults. This will make it easier to set the study up quickly and let us simplify how we collect data.

What do I do if I am interested in taking part or want more information?

Please email Professor Laura Shallcross at UCL who is leading the study – l.shallcross@ucl.ac.uk or cctu.vivaldi@ucl.ac.uk

Further information

More information about our previous work on the VIVALDI study is available here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/health-informatics/research/vivaldi-study>