

# COVID-19 TESTING AND THE PERSON LIVING WITH DEMENTIA IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

The below algorithm should be read in conjunction with official HSE guidance on [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) / [www.hselibrary.ie](http://www.hselibrary.ie)

This guidance is to address issues related to testing people with dementia for COVID-19

Testing for COVID-19 can be **distressing and overwhelming** for many people with dementia.

- Explaining the testing procedure is important;
- This may be more difficult for people with advanced dementia to understand;
- Ensure all practicable steps are taken to enable understanding of the procedure and what it entails;
- Undertake the test at a time when the staff member knows the resident might be most relaxed.
- Use familiar language when outlining the process and the reason for the test, as the person might not know what COVID is.
- If the person is distressed only one familiar person (e.g. staff member) should talk and explain the process, while the other person should then administer the test.
- Use a clear mask so the tester's face and mouth can be seen.

Where possible, Residential Care Facility staff should be trained as testers. Where this is not possible staff should be advised to have a **list of residents** who they feel will be unable to take part and may become verbally or physically distressed as a result.

**Note:** In some cases where clinical presentation suggests a diagnosis of COVID-19 and it is not possible to gain consent or where it would be too stressful for the person with dementia, the medical officer may decide not to refer for testing and in such cases a positive diagnosis would be assumed.

**USE of PPE:** PPE can be frightening for the person with dementia. They may not understand why the equipment is being worn; they may not recognize staff or pick-up facial and body cues to aid communication. How you communicate becomes very important:

- Get the person's attention by touching their arm.
- Remain calm, use a reassuring, positive tone of voice.
- If possible establish clear YES-NO signals e.g. thumbs up for yes etc.
- Use other gestures as appropriate.
- If possible have a photo of yourself to hand.
- Use smiley stickers that can be discarded with the equipment.

