

Email: [myhealthmycaremyhome@gov.scot](mailto:myhealthmycaremyhome@gov.scot)

To: Collaborative Care Home Support Teams: -  
Executive Nurse Directors, Chief Social Work Officers,  
IJB Chief Officers, Directors of Public Health  
Care Inspectorate  
Community Pharmacy Scotland  
NHS Pharmacy and Medical Directors  
Primary Care Leads  
Chair of Scottish Dietitians  
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities  
Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland  
Scottish Care  
Food Standards Scotland

7 December 2023

Dear Colleagues

### **Vitamin D supplements for care home residents**

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of guidance that is being circulated to care homes in Scotland about the importance of taking vitamin D supplements. This initiative will be led by care home staff and should have minimal impact on general practices, community nursing and pharmacies. There may be occasions when healthcare professionals in Primary Care are asked for advice about the suitability of individual residents to receive vitamin D supplements, but there should be no requirement for any new prescriptions to be issued by general practice staff.

Vitamin D is important for keeping bones and muscles healthy. Current advice is that everyone should consider taking a 10 microgram (mcg) or 400 international unit (IU) daily supplement of vitamin D, particularly during the winter months. However, groups at higher risk of vitamin D deficiency, including people living in care homes, are advised to take a daily supplement all year round. This advice is based on recommendations from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. Advice on vitamin D intake is consistent across the UK. Information on vitamin D, including through audio, translations and easy read, can be found on [Vitamin D | NHS inform](#).

The Chief Medical Officer wrote to care homes in January 2021, to recommend that those living in care homes are offered vitamin D supplements, taking into account their needs and preferences. In response to feedback from the care home sector around the need for guidance on implementation, the Scottish Government established a short life working group (SLWG) to make recommendations on how this could be achieved consistently. The membership of the SLWG is in Annex A.

This group recommended that vitamin D supplementation should be offered in a person-centred way, where discussions and decisions take place within the care home through

dialogue between staff and residents, and where appropriate, families. This should be done on an individual basis, taking into account the resident's personal choice, needs and circumstances and without over-medicalising something that is a nutritional supplement, rather than a medicine or drug. Guidance materials were developed to support care home staff.

A pilot within care homes in NHS Ayrshire and Arran was undertaken to test resource materials, access, uptake and recording. The pilot demonstrated that it was possible for care homes to offer the supplement to residents in a safe and person-centred way. In the majority of circumstances, care homes were confident in using the guidance materials without the need to seek advice from their general practice, primary care or community pharmacy teams.

Where care home staff have specific queries regarding an individual's circumstances, such as in relation to a medical diagnosis or existing prescribed medication that is not detailed within the guidance, then they have been advised to seek advice from their primary and community pharmacy, general practice or community nursing teams in a non-urgent way. They can also seek advice from their local Collaborative Care Home Support Teams (or equivalent) who provide advice and support to care homes including around implementation of the [My Health, My Care, My Home - healthcare framework for adults living in care homes](#)

Care home staff should not request a prescription for vitamin D supplements from general practices. The recommended dosage of 10 micrograms is classed as a nutritional supplement and is lower than the treatment dosages of vitamin D available on prescription. Care homes should make their own arrangements in terms of purchasing the supplement. These are readily available 'over the counter' from supermarkets, pharmacies and health food stores. As is good practice, care home staff have been asked to inform the resident's general practice whenever a supplement has been commenced. This advice applies to people living in care homes who are not already receiving Vitamin D. If an individual is already being prescribed vitamin D by their general practice (at any dose) then this should continue to be prescribed by the general practice and the care home do not need to consider any additional vitamin D supplements.

The guidance materials to support care homes in having discussions and making decisions with those living in care homes can be found on the Care Inspectorate webpage [Vitamin D in care homes](#). Further information on vitamin D can be found in [Eating and Drinking Well in Care: Good Practice Guidance for Older People](#) which provides information on older people's dietary needs and related food and fluid requirements.

We are encouraging care homes to adopt this guidance as soon as it is practical to do so. Discussions around vitamin D supplements can form part of regular routine care planning, for example on admission to a care home or as part of a care plan review.

To raise awareness of the guidance, workshops for care homes and those providing support have been arranged (details below). There will be presentations from NHS Ayrshire and Arran regarding the vitamin D pilot and from Food Standards Scotland, along with an opportunity to ask questions. The content of the workshops will be the same, so there is no need to attend both.

Workshop joining details:

Date: Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> December, 3:00-4:30pm

Joining link: [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 381 780 582 889

Passcode: zbMqkn

Or call in (audio only)

[+44 131 376 2847](tel:+441313762847), [122762797#](tel:+441313762847) United Kingdom, Edinburgh

Phone Conference ID: 122 762 797#

Date: Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 11:00-12:30pm

Joining link: [Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 325 785 468 511

Passcode: evkMze

Or call in (audio only)

[+44 131 376 2847](tel:+441313762847), [1016923#](tel:+441313762847) United Kingdom, Edinburgh

Phone Conference ID: 101 692 3#

We hope this information is useful and would like to thank you in advance for any support that you provide care home staff with this initiative.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Paul Baughan**

Chair SLWG

Professional Adviser for Ageing and Health  
Scottish Government



**Alpana Mair**

Chair SLWG

Head of Effective Prescribing and  
Therapeutics Division, Scottish Government

## **Annex A – Membership of the Vitamin D in Care Homes SLWG**

### Chairs:

Professional Adviser for Ageing and Health, Chief Medical Officer Directorate, Scottish Government

Head of Effective Prescribing and Therapeutics Division, Scottish Government

### Members:

Care home providers

Scottish Care

Pharmacists

Consultant dietitian

Senior nurse NHS Board care home support team

Clinical lecturer in geriatric medicine

NHS Geriatrician

Associate Medical Director Primary Care

Healthcare Improvement Scotland

Care Inspectorate

Food Standards Scotland

Scottish Government policy officials and clinical advisers