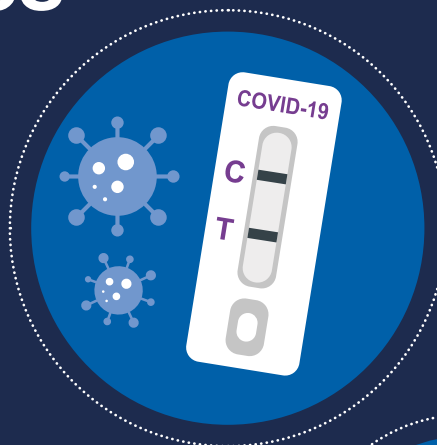


# The impact of COVID-19 on the health of domiciliary care workers in Wales



Results from the OSCAR study

# What is Domiciliary Care?

**Many adults with physical or mental health conditions need extra support to live independently at home.**

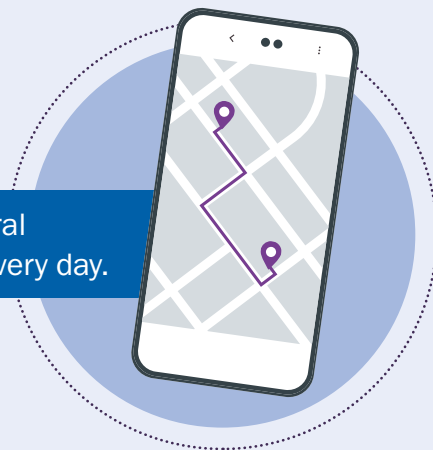
In Wales, much of this help is provided by specially trained staff known as domiciliary care workers or care workers.

These staff provide care in clients home including personal and supportive care.

This may include:

- washing and dressing
- cleaning and laundry
- support with medications

Care workers may visit several clients in their community every day.



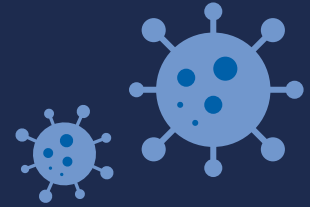
# Why was this research needed?

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, domiciliary care didn't stop.

Instead, care workers followed guidelines on PPE, testing and isolating.

Studies in 2020 found some health and care workers could be at particular risk from COVID-19.

But we did not know what the health impact was for care workers.



**We wanted to find out how the COVID-19 pandemic affected these care workers.**



# What we did



## We explored:

- whether care workers were more likely to catch COVID-19 than other people
- how the pandemic affected their overall mental health and key or relevant aspects of their physical health.

## Our study had two parts:



To read about this in more detail see our paper [here](#)

# In our interview study...

## Carers told us about:

### Changes in their working role, for example:

Increases in workload, safety precautions, use of virtual communication.

### Practical challenges, for example:

Staff shortages, supply and use of PPE, others not following safety procedures.

### Lack of pandemic preparation, for example:

Discharge of patients from hospital, information and training for care workers.

**These could affect the risk of COVID-19 and other poor health outcomes for carers and their clients.**



**“I was here in the thick of it, working every day that week because everybody was going down one by one ... and I was the only one that didn’t get it. ... But I had already prepared. I had bought myself this [mask]. I came in here and I did not take that off”.**

# In our interview study...

**Carers also told us about how working during the pandemic affected them.**



## **This included:**

- The impact on their emotional and mental health
- Impacts for them... but also for their families and their clients
- Feeling positive and valued from adapting and providing care when most needed during the pandemic
- How effects could also be a result of planned and unplanned changes in working practice

**This work shows in depth how the pandemic affected carer well-being.**

**“I just kept thinking, if I get it and I give it to one of these old people, they’re going to die... I’d never forgive myself, if I took it and gave it to [clients] who I know have got bad chests for example”.**

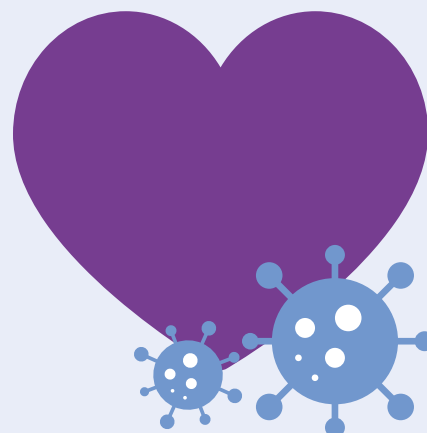
**“You know, just my fear of bringing it home to my family, you know, it was just, that was my biggest fear”.**

# In our health records study...

We included  
care workers  
registered  
in Wales



We looked at the health of  
care workers before the  
pandemic and then during the  
pandemic from March 2020  
to November 2021



We linked 15,725  
care workers to their  
health records



Information that could identify  
care workers had been removed -  
their privacy remained protected



**15,725**

domiciliary care  
workers on  
the Register with  
linkable data



**16%** Male  
**84%** Female

**9%**  
speak fluent Welsh

**95%**  
White

**3%**  
Black, Mixed, Asian

**2%**  
ethnicity not recorded

**45**

average age  
of workers

**1%**  
considered themselves  
to be disabled

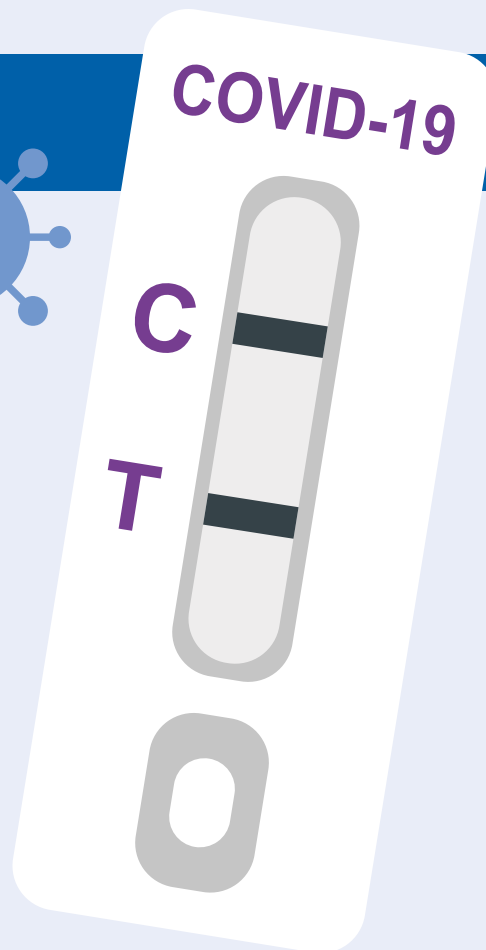
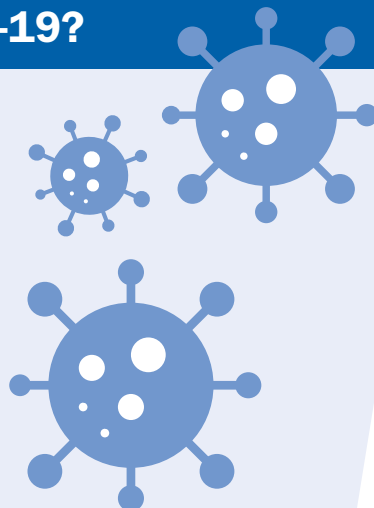
# In our health records study...

## How many care workers had confirmed cases of COVID-19?

By November 2021

**23.5%**

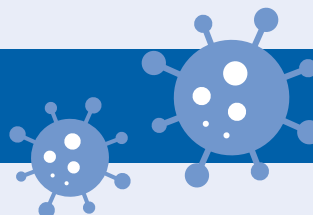
of care workers  
had tested positive  
for COVID-19



### Some more detail:

- The rate was higher for females
- Care workers living in urban areas had higher rates
- Rates differed by employment sector. For example, care workers employed by Local Authorities had higher rates than those working for private or third sector employers.

Deaths due to COVID-19 were rare and at a comparable rate to the wider Welsh population of a similar age.





# In our health records study...

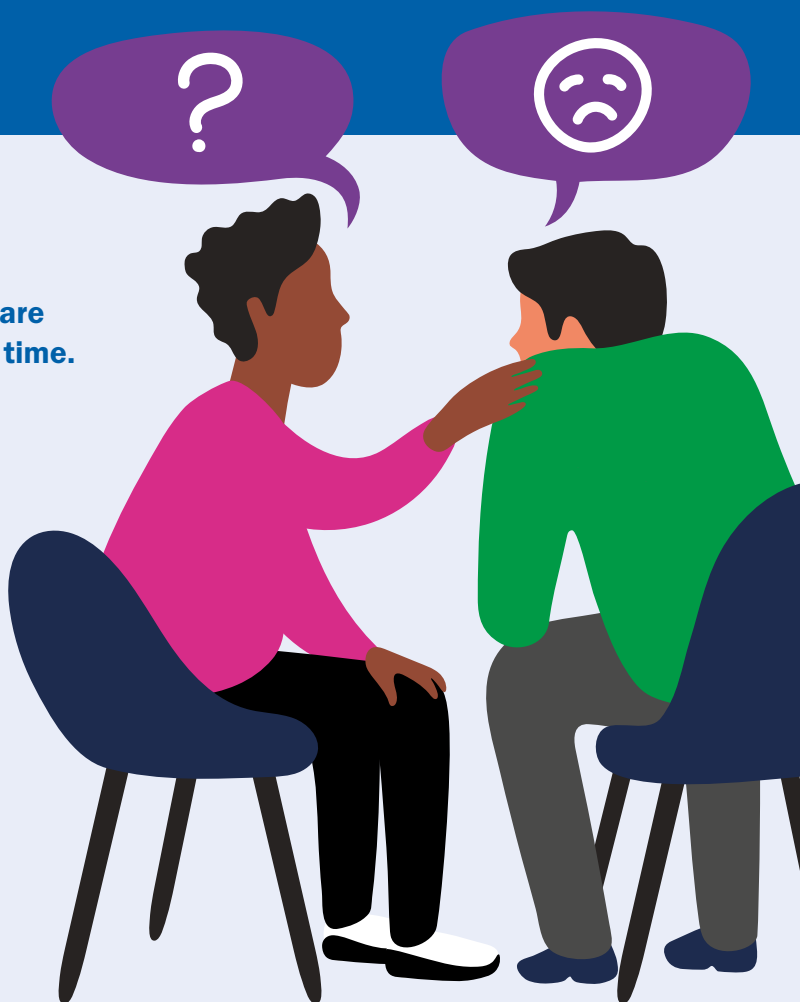
## Carer mental health during the pandemic

### We found high rates of mental health need (34%)

By this we mean care workers received care for a mental health diagnosis during this time.

#### Some more detail:

- These rates are increased compared to pre-pandemic numbers
- Rates were lower for males and those 55 years old and above
- Rates were higher for those with a disability, with at least one co-morbidity and on the shielding list.



“I was working a lot of hours and I was coming home, and sort of not really speaking to anyone, because I just found it quite difficult to sort of deal with”.

# In our health records study...

## How many care workers are there across the UK?



**England**

**590,000**  
care workers



**Northern  
Ireland**

**16,303**  
care workers



**Scotland**

**74,870**  
care workers



**Wales**

**22,131**  
care workers

## We reported the rate of mental health need for care workers in Wales

Assuming a similar rate across all nations, this is how many care workers might have been seeking support for their mental health during the pandemic:



**England**

**200,000**  
care workers



**Northern  
Ireland**

**5,500**  
care workers



**Scotland**

**25,400**  
care workers



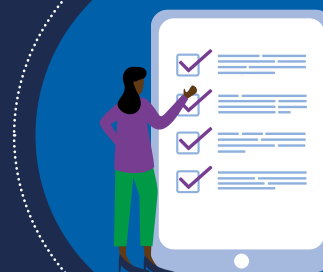
**Wales**

**7,500**  
care workers



# Recommendations we have made from talking to care workers

- Adequate funding to address on-going sickness, recruitment, retention and well-being of staff
- Rapid dissemination of funding and guidance for PPE and Lateral Flow Test to employers
- Effective screening and planning for patients returning home from hospital
- COVID-19 risk assessments tailored to the care worker role
- Improved signposting of trusted information on COVID-19 prevention measures for care workers and clients
- Improved teamwork and communication for care worker teams including signposting for support
- Acknowledgement of challenges faced by care workers by employers, national media and political leaders



**Some recommendations addressed challenges early in the pandemic.**

**Some recommendations are relevant beyond the pandemic to better support care workers.**

**For the full list of recommendations follow this [link](#)**

# Stakeholders for this research

We worked with key stakeholders to interpret the study findings and develop our recommendations. Our stakeholders were:



**CARE WORKERS  
AND CARE MANAGERS**



**POLICY MAKERS AND  
REGULATORS FROM  
ACROSS THE UK**



**EMPLOYERS, UNIONS AND  
ORGANISATIONS WHO SUPPORT  
AND TRAIN CARE WORKERS**



**PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITIES AND  
RESEARCHERS IN THIS AREA**

# Ongoing areas of need we have identified from our research

Now we are moving beyond the pandemic, we're asking key stakeholders...

**1**

What are the opportunities to intervene?



Mental health wellbeing

**2**

What support (networks and other) need to be established and maintained?



Isolation

**3**

What can be done to continue to assess and reduce risks?



**Risk**  
To self, family and clients

Areas of need

# Next steps

**1** Recommendations have been made for regulators, policy and employers to consider

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**2** Continue to follow up DCWs in Wales now we have an established cohort

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**3** Compare our care worker population to control group of the Welsh public

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# Acknowledgements

## Thank you to those carers we spoke to!

This work uses data provided by patients and collected by the NHS as part of their care and support **#datasaveslives**

This study makes use of anonymised data held in the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) Databank, project approval 1126. We would like to acknowledge all the data providers who make anonymised data available for research including Social Care Wales who provided the care worker workforce data.

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With thanks to the OSCAR Study Advisory Group and the OSCAR Implementation Reference Group.

### Further information

Study website: [www.cardiff.ac.uk/centre-for-trials-research/research/studies-and-trials/view/oscar](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/centre-for-trials-research/research/studies-and-trials/view/oscar)

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