

3 December 2020

Dear Colleague,

COVID-19 antibody testing study: primary care and social care

I am writing to inform you of a new antibody testing service that has been introduced into Northern Ireland as part of the UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) antibody testing programme to support surveillance studies across the UK.

This service will conduct testing as part of a seroprevalence study in Northern Ireland. This will help us understand COVID-19 and how it has spread. It is an extension of the seroprevalence study that has been conducted in secondary care to date. The extension of the study will include the following groups:

- Those working in primary care (for example a GP, pharmacist, community nurse, dental nurse or optician)
- Those working in any job in a care home
- Care workers in paid domiciliary care (caring for people in their homes)

Only those aged 18 or over are eligible to participate. It is anticipated that the study will widen over time to include further groups of key workers.

In order to participate, individuals must register for a test online through the GOV.UK website: <https://www.gov.uk/register-coronavirus-antibody-test>. An email or text message will be sent inviting the individual to order a test kit. Not



all who register for a test may receive one. The test is a finger prick capillary blood test which is undertaken at home and posted back to a laboratory.

Antibody tests are used to detect antibodies to the COVID-19 virus to see if someone has previously had the virus. However, it is very important to note that, as COVID-19 is a new disease, our understanding of the body's immune response to it is very limited. We do not know, for example, how long an antibody response lasts, nor whether having antibodies means you can't be infected again or transmit the virus to others. Thus, at this time, any result cannot and should not influence behaviours.

These tests do not replace COVID-19 swab tests used to determine if people currently have the virus.

Our understanding of the virus will grow as new scientific evidence and studies emerge, and participation in this study of COVID antibody status in Northern Ireland will assist with the growth of knowledge.

Further information on the testing and the seroprevalence study is included in the attached document.

Yours faithfully



Dr Brid Farrell

Assistant Director of Service Development, Safety and Quality
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Further information

What do antibody test results mean?

A positive antibody test demonstrates that someone has developed antibodies to the virus. The presence of antibodies signals that the body has come into contact with coronavirus-19 and has responded by developing antibodies.

Our understanding of the virus will grow as new scientific evidence and studies emerge, and your participation in this study of COVID antibody status in adult social care in N Ireland will assist with the growth of knowledge.

If you test positive for antibodies, can you ignore lockdown restrictions?

No. **There is no evidence to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune.** This is the current position of the World Health Organisation.

You should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

How will my information be used?

Your data will be anonymised and shared, together with grouped data from others in the seroprevalence study, with statisticians and other workers in disease surveillance from the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency. It will help provide information on whether some groups of workers are more at risk, on the prevalence of COVID-19 in different areas of Northern Ireland, and will help better understand how the disease spreads.

The result of your test will be documented on your Electronic Care Record. Your GP will be able to access the result if required.

How will I be informed of the result?

The result of the test will be communicated to you by email or text message. You should get your result within 3 to 7 days of taking the test (usually by text or email).

Improving Your Health and Wellbeing



How do I proceed with testing?

To sign up for a test, individuals will need to register on the online portal at:
<https://www.gov.uk/register-coronavirus-antibody-test>

If selected for a test, you will receive a text or email inviting you to book the test. The test kit is posted to you. It comes with everything you need. You take the test (a finger prick blood sample) and post your sample back. Your results will be sent by email or text.

Further information and guidance can be found at the GOV.UK website:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-antibody-tests/coronavirus-covid-19-antibody-tests>

If there are any queries about the results of an antibody test, these should be directed to the 119 helpline service.

