Healthcare Improvement Scotland

Position regarding testing for COVID-19 in Independent Healthcare Services at 3 August 2020

Antibody (serology) Testing position

Current serology testing cannot tell the degree of protection conferred by the presence of antibodies, which antibodies are protective, the duration of any protection, and whether this prevents acquisition and/or transmission of virus. Until we can be confident of this, the only clinically safe option is to assume no meaningful immunity from a positive result. Therefore, Healthcare Improvement Scotland does not currently support their use.


Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR Testing)

All testing for current COVID-19 infection, where the person is symptomatic, in Scotland must be part of Test and Protect (https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-test-and-protect/) to ensure that all the required public health action is taken in the event of a positive result. In particular the tracing of contacts.

RT-PCR testing is aimed at people who have possible symptoms of COVID-19. RT-PCR is not routinely used to screen people who are asymptomatic, as it is less reliable in people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19. Therefore, Healthcare Improvement Scotland does not support testing in asymptomatic patients.

However, we recognise there are a number of circumstances where a negative PCR test is a prerequisite for a number of activities, for example prior to essential travel or a healthcare treatment. Therefore, if RT-PCR testing is going to be undertaken by a service, then the information below must be followed.

1. It is important that samples are sent to UKAS accredited laboratories for analysis. While it is unlikely that any lab will be accredited by UKAS for testing in relation to SARS-CoV-2 a laboratory must be chosen that has an existing accreditation for similar viral tests.

2. It must be made clear to individuals being tested in writing, that:
   - A positive test result in an asymptomatic person should be taken as indicating COVID-19 infection, and the person should immediately enter 10 days self-isolation, and their household members 14 days household isolation, in line with Government advice.
   - A patient with a positive test result must be immediately directed to have another test via the national testing programme to ensure they enter the Test and Protect system quickly.
   - A negative test result in an asymptomatic person does not rule out the possibility of infection, that they are incubating the infection or the possibility that they have been exposed to the infection after the test was taken. Therefore, individuals should continue to follow FACTS’ guidance (Face coverings in enclosed spaces, Avoid
crowded places, Clean your hands and surfaces regularly, Two-metre social distancing and Self-isolate and book a test if you develop coronavirus symptoms).

Services are reminded that SARS-CoV-2 is a notifiable organism and COVID-19 is a notifiable disease under the emergency legislation brought into force to support the nation deal with the pandemic. If an individual is tested and they are positive for the virus then your diagnostic laboratory must, within 10 days of a positive result, notify the health board in whose area the diagnostic laboratory is situated, in writing, of the person's name, address, sex, date of birth and NHS identifier (if known).


Public Health Scotland have advised the Offshore Industry through their medical advisors that testing of offshore workers is not required prior to their being deployed offshore. Public Health Scotland have also advised the Offshore Industry that they should not deploy workers from high or moderate risk countries.