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News

Testing expansion

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Target reached as capacity increases.

A further expansion of coronavirus (COVID-19) testing in Scotland has been announced as it was confirmed that the target to reach capacity for 3,500 tests a day across NHS labs has been exceeded.

The normal daily capacity for analysing tests in Scotland has now reached 8,350. This figure is made up of 4,350 NHS tests and 4,000 from the Glasgow Lighthouse Laboratory.

The First Minister confirmed the numbers as she announced testing in Scotland will be expanded to include:

- enhanced outbreak investigation in all care homes where there are cases of COVID - this will involve testing, subject to individuals' consent, all residents and staff, whether or not they have symptoms. Where staff work between homes run by the same operator, testing will also take place in those homes following a risk assessment
- sample testing in care homes without cases of the virus. This will involve testing of some asymptomatic residents and social care workers
- testing through the regional testing centres and mobile units of symptomatic over 65s, and those with symptoms who cannot work from home and need to leave their homes to work. Households of these two groups will also be eligible for tests where they have symptoms. The online booking system for these tests is being updated and tests will be available over the weekend
- Health Protection Scotland will introduce antibody testing as part of enhanced surveillance testing. Antibody testing detects whether somebody is likely to have had the virus more than two weeks ago. It takes approximately two weeks for the immune response to fully develop. Starting next week, blood samples from across Scotland will be tested as part of this

enhanced surveillance enabling us to learn more about the virus and gain an understanding of how it is spreading through the population in Scotland

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said:

“At the start of this outbreak, only two laboratories in Scotland carried out tests. Now there are labs at all 14 health boards, we have exceeded our target to test 3,500 samples a day in the NHS and, working with the Lighthouse Lab at Glasgow University, capacity for testing in Scotland has now reached 8,323 and is on track to expand further this month.

“Given that our capacity has now expanded significantly, that means we can further extend eligibility for testing.

“We now intend to undertake enhanced outbreak investigation in all care homes where there are cases of COVID-19 - this will involve testing, subject to individuals’ consent, all residents and staff, whether or not they have symptoms. In addition, we are testing symptomatic over 65s as well as those who need to leave their homes to work.

“We are also expanding the surveillance testing programme to include antibody testing. This is another tool which will allow us to monitor the proportion of people exposed to COVID-19 and help tackle its spread across the population.”

Background

Testing at Regional Testing Centres and mobile units

In addition to key workers currently eligible, all symptomatic over 65s and household and those of any age who are symptomatic who need to leave their homes to work and household will have access to tests. Tests will be booked through the UK Government’s on-line system at <https://self-referral.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/> and will be conducted at five regional drive-through test sites in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness and Perth and at mobile test sites being initially located at a number of locations including Motherwell, Dunoon, Prestwick, Stranraer, Galashiels, Peterhead and Elgin. At times a queuing system may have to be put into operation on the website for those locations where demand is highest. This is monitored regularly.

Serology stream of the enhanced surveillance programme (antibody testing)

The serology stream of Health Protection Scotland’s enhanced surveillance programme will run for at least 16 weeks and will initially involve six NHS boards; expansion into other boards is also planned. Approximately 500 residual blood samples from biochemistry laboratories (submitted from primary care) will be tested per week at the Scottish Microbiology Reference Laboratory in Inverness. To ensure comparability with other UK data, HPS will be using similar methodology originally developed by Public Health England. To achieve a fair representation of the Scottish population, the initial samples will be distributed across the six participating boards, and by age-group and sex.

Laboratory capacity to process tests in Scotland on 30 April 2020

NHS Scotland Labs: 4,350 tests

Glasgow University Lighthouse Laboratory: 4,000 tests

Total current capacity in Scotland: 8,350 tests.

Target was 3,500 by end April.

Note:

Since the start of the Coronavirus outbreak, NHS lab capacity has been increased from two NHS labs (Glasgow and Edinburgh) with total capacity to do 350 tests a day, to a point today where there is lab testing capacity in all 14 health board areas.

NHS Scotland labs – this figure represents maximum capacity. Capacity may fluctuate – and exceed testing demand – on a daily basis for a number of reasons. We work closely with health boards to improve the efficiency of the testing system and the National Labs Programme (led by NSS) is leading work to optimise the capacity utilisation of the system.

The capacity of NHS Scotland labs is projected to increase to at least 8,000 by the middle of May.

Tests carried out in Scotland on 30 April 2020

Tests done by NHS in hospitals/community/care homes: 2,537 tests *

Tests done by drive-throughs/mobile/homes testing: 2,124 tests **

Total number of tests done in Scotland on 30 April: 4,661

Note:

The drive through/mobile/homes testing number has not previously been included in daily figures. It will be from now on.

Sources: * Health Protection Scotland and ** Deloitte

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