



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

INFORMATION NOTE

To: PS/SOSFA

From:

Name Redacted

C-19 Policy

Department

Approved by:

Name Redacted

C-19 Policy

Department (SMS)

Date:

1 September 2020

Name Redacted

COVID-19 “TEST AND RELEASE” FOR INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS

Summary

1. On 23 July COVID-O agreed to consider testing for international arrivals. DHSC are considering options involving home tests after self-isolating for 5-8 days, with those testing negative released from self-isolation. If agreed, travel between the UK and countries currently subject to border measures, including the US, would become easier. Policy and operational questions to be resolved include:
 - a. Testing capacity;
 - b. Timing of testing;
 - c. Rationale for ‘Test and Release’ for international arrivals but not contacts;
 - d. Stance of the Devolved Administrations;
 - e. Enforcement.
2. The next COVID-O will consider further and No 10 are aware of the work.

Detail

3. The Foreign Secretary asked for an update.

Testing capacity

4. The Health Secretary had asked DHSC to assess the viability of testing international arrivals by private providers because Government testing is operating at capacity. Daily demand is estimated at ~37,000 at current volumes and ~200,000 at business as usual volumes, which would require significant reprioritization. Although initial engagement with private providers indicated capacity to test current volumes of passengers, such testing could divert supplies or laboratory capacity at the same time as the domestic Track and Trace regime seeks to increase. DHSC are considering implementing testing with a monthly review so it could be discontinued if capacity were diverted from NHS Track and

Trace, and the Transport Secretary has also asked the Health Secretary to look further at Government testing. The question remains unresolved.

Test timing

5. Industry would like those testing negative on arrival at an airport to be exempt from self-isolation, but there is no significant data to support this option. Iceland tried it, but replaced it with Day 5 or 6 test and release, following advice from Iceland's Chief Epidemiologist that Day 0 testing had poor efficacy. Germany has Day 0 Test and Release in place but has yet to publish data. SAGE / SPI-M / PHE modelling suggests a success rate in identifying cases through Day 0 testing of 7%, whilst Day 5 is 88%, and Day 8 is 94%. There is a 99% success rate for 14 day self-isolation. **DHSC is therefore likely to recommend those arriving self-isolate, and do a home test on a day between 5 and 8, rather than Day 0 at the airport.**
6. **The Devolved Administrations** have indicated a preference for maintaining the 14 day self-isolation period. **Without agreement there could be separate testing regimes in the four nations.**

Public rationale

7. DHSC are concerned that Test and Release for international arrivals may undermine compliance with domestic self-isolation, particularly for contacts of those who test positive within the UK. **The Behavioural Insights Team is advising on messaging.**

Enforcement

8. Test and Release would introduce three compliance and enforcement points: those awaiting test who test negative; following a positive test result; and those who do not take a test. We understand DFT will write to COVID-O with proposals to increase in-country enforcement.