Title: Test and Trace Paper – NPHET

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Date: 29th March 2021

Action required:
☐ For noting
☑ For discussion
☐ For decision

Approved for future publication: YES/NO (remove as applicable)
Updates are provided below regarding the following aspects of Testing and Contact Tracing:

1) Testing and Tracing new initiatives,
2) Activity levels across referrals, sampling, laboratory testing and contact tracing,
3) Turnaround Times,
4) Testing Programmes,
5) Recruitment.

1. Testing and Tracing new Initiatives

We are currently working on 5 new key initiatives to the testing and tracing programme of work.

- **Source Investigation/Backwards Tracing** – Significant work is being undertaken by the Contact Management Programme in conjunction with public health, Office of the CIO and other partners on defining the final model (building on the pilot completed in December 2020) for source investigation.

- The work has involved building out the system specifications, agreeing required disease transmission levels under which different levels of source investigation are viable across regions and agreeing change and implementation timelines.

- Backwards contact tracing / source investigation is considered most effective when there are low levels of community transmission, and less effective when there are high levels of community transmission.

- The latest systems changes will be completed by the 30th March, from this date source investigation will be conducted aligned to levels of community transmission prevailing at that time.

- From 31st March, contact tracers will ask additional questions to confirmed cases who are noted as “community transmission”. They will go back 7 days to identify possible sources of transmission. Public health will review the data and decide if further testing is required in settings identified.

- **Alternative referral pathway for testing** – A working group was been set up to produce proposals for a pilot of a self-referral pathway for asymptomatic individuals. This working group has met numerous times and is looking at walk ins, phone lines and online testing. The walk in clinics are opening this week in areas of high disease prevalence to target people who don’t have any symptoms and may not have a GP. A total of 20% of cases are asymptomatic, so this initiative is aimed at finding these cases and making it easier to get tested. Each site can take up to 500 swabs per day. There will be 5 open this week for 7 days. The development of a phone line is underway.

- **Approach to Antigen testing pilot in schools/third level** – An Antigen Testing Working Group has been established to develop a pilot study approach for antigen testing on asymptomatic individuals in post-primary and third level facilities. The main objective of the working group is to identify the operational requirements for implementing an antigen test pilot study. The group are currently focusing on secondary school staff and students and third level staff and students as being the main cohort for this pilot study. The next step is to engage with the relevant government departments and select an assay (antigen test).
• **Testing at Quarantine sites** – A working group has been established with members of the Department of Health, the National Ambulance Service and various HSE teams to establish a serial testing programme at Quarantine sites. This will commence on Friday, 26th March and will be monitored on a daily basis with reporting available to all parties.

• **Self-isolation and Restricted Movement Support** – On 19th March we started to call all detected cases and their close contacts on Day 4 to check in with them. We check they understand the public health advice, are still isolating or restricting movements and are aware of the supports available to them.

2. **Activity levels across referrals, sampling, laboratory and contact tracing**

**Summary**

Test and Trace Service performance indicators from the 19th – 25th of March, show an increase of c.49% in terms of weekly community testing demand, in comparison to the same time period last week. Demand is being driven by the 0-13 age cohorts and those aged 20-40.

The positivity rate has remained stable at 3.8% as of March 26th. As of March 26th of those tested with close contacts, the average number of close contacts per case was 3.3. Demand planning scenarios are refreshed on an ongoing basis and proactive demand and capacity planning activities are being used to support operational planning across the end-to-end pathway.

Planning continues on the development of a medium-term operational plan for the Test & Trace service guided by the medium-term profile of demand and activity across various scenarios. Work is under way to define the service elements for each demand range over the coming weeks and months. Once outputs are developed stakeholder engagement will be undertaken to ensure alignment on the service priorities and limits over the period. This planning continues to make assumptions regarding restrictions, serial testing, the impact of vaccination, variants of concern among other operational items such as local Department of Public Health capacity to respond to complex cases. The medium-term operating model will also consider the impact of the introduction of self-referral pathway for asymptomatic individuals to facilitate more widespread testing.

**Referral Data and results**

Community testing referral data from 18th – 24th of March shows that the group with the largest amount of all referrals is the 31-40 age group, which makes up 23.8% of all referrals. The detected rate for the 31-40 age group is c.12.4%.
**Sampling in the community and in acute settings.**

Over the seven-day period, 19th – 25th March, there has been approximately **121,184 swabs** taken for COVID-19 testing. Demand for testing in the community test centres has increased by c.49% from this time last week.

A total of 54,433 swabs were taken in the community, the majority were performed at fixed testing sites and a portion as home visits. Approximately 45,941 swabs were taken in acute and private acute settings. The remainder 20,810 swabs were taken as part of the Serial Testing Programmes of staff in Residential Care Facilities including mental health facilities and disability facilities that meet the agreed criteria and staff in Food Production Facilities.
Laboratory Testing

Over the seven-day period 19th – 25th March, there has been 115,579 lab tests completed. A total of 64,501 of these tests were processed in community laboratories, 32,104 tests were processed in acute laboratories and 18,974 were processed in private labs. Over the past seven days, there were no tests processed by our offshore laboratory partner.

Below is a breakdown of Covid-19 lab tests completed over the past four weeks, in community, acute, and private lab settings.

![Breakdown of COVID-19 lab tests completed]

Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is carried out in contact tracing centres in Galway, Limerick, Cork and Dublin.

The gathering of enhanced Positive Patient Assessment data recommenced on Wednesday 10th February. On this date Day 0 and Day 10 swabbing for close contacts also recommended.

From 19th – 25th of March, there was a total of 3,992 call 1s completed.

During the same period there was a total of 3,531 call 2s completed, completing contact tracing for this number of individuals. A number of individuals did not require contact tracing.

There was a total of 5,695 call 3s made to close contacts of a confirmed COVID 19 case.

On the 25th of March, of those tested with close contacts, the mean number of close contacts was 3.3

3. Turnaround Times (19th – 25th of March)

End-to-end turnaround time

We continue to keep sharp focus on end-to-end turnaround times, highlighting any opportunity for improvement, while recognising that some cases are increasingly complex in nature.
Over the seven-day period 19th – 25th of March;

- The median end-to-end turnaround time, from referral to SMS, for *not detected* tests in the community setting was **1.3 days**.
- The median turnaround time, from referral to communication of a *detected result* by call, in community setting was **1.8 days**.
- The median end-to-end turnaround time, from referral to contact tracing completed, for *detected results* in the community setting was **2 days**.

**Referral to appointment**

In the community, the median time from referral to appointment was **0.2 days**.

A total of **94.6%** of community referrals are provided with a COVID-19 test appointment within 24 hours.

**Swab to lab result**

For swabs processed in a community lab, the median time for swab to lab result was **23 hours**.

For swabs processed in an acute lab, the median time for swab to lab result was **22 hours**.

The combined median time from swab to lab result was **23 hours**.

**Overall Swab to laboratory result communicated – Medians**

- 25 hours in Acute.
- 26 hours in Serial Testing.
- 26 hours in Community.

**Contact Tracing**

The average time to complete all calls is **6.0 hours** and the median time to complete all calls is **3.7 hours**.

**Education and Childcare Facility turnaround times**

The median turnaround time from swab taken to result communicated in education and childcare facilities was **1.1 day**.

**4. Testing Programmes**

**Serial Testing in Nursing Homes**

Serial testing in Nursing Homes commenced on the 23rd of June. To date, the programme has completed 668,703 tests and identified 4,562 detected cases. This is a detected rate of **0.68%**.
Cycle 9 of serial testing in Nursing Homes commenced on the 1st of March. To date, the cycle has completed 58,186 tests and has identified 105 detected cases. This is a detected rate of 0.18%. This is the lowest level since Cycle 1.

Serial Testing in Mental Health Facilities

Testing in mental health facilities commenced on the 25th of January. Facilities taking part in this testing programme will feature as a mixture of once off and serial testing. To date, the programme has completed 3,396 tests and identified 15 detected cases. This is a detected rate of 0.44%.

Cycle 2 of serial testing in Mental Health facilities commenced on 1st March. To date, there has been a total of 1,395 swabs carried out and 8 detected cases have been identified. This is a detected rate of 0.57%.

Disability Facilities Testing Programme

Testing in disability services commenced on the 25th of January. Facilities taking part in this testing programme will be included for a round of once off testing, which will be reviewed once a full cycle has been completed. In this current cycle to date, cycle 1, there has been a total of 5,686 swabs carried out and a total of 27 detected cases have been identified. This is a detected rate of 0.47%.

Serial Testing in Food Production Facilities

Serial testing in food production facilities commenced on the 21st of August. To date, the programme has completed 150,854 tests and identified 1,239 detected cases. This is a detected rate of 0.82%.
Cycle 7 of serial testing in food production facilities commenced on the 8th of March, and has completed 17,490 tests, with 104 detected cases identified. This is a detected rate of 0.59%.

Education and Childcare Testing Programme

COVID-19 testing has re-started in schools and is ongoing in special education and childcare facilities. In the last week (14th – 20th March 2021);

- 1,236 tests were completed in 71 childcare facilities resulting in a 9.6% positivity rate.
- 103 tests were completed in 11 Special Education facilities resulting in a 9.7% detection rate.
- 3,142 tests were completed in 120 primary schools resulting in in a 2.7% positivity rate.
- 817 tests were completed in 52 post-primary facilities resulting in a 1.8% positivity rate.

The graphs below provide an overview of the positivity trends in each of the education and childcare settings:
Four-week overview of the positivity trends in childcare facilities

**Positivity Trends in Childcare Facilities**

![Graph showing positivity trends in childcare facilities]

Four-week overview of the positivity trends in childcare facilities

**Positivity Trends in Special Education Settings**

![Graph showing positivity trends in special education settings]

Four-week overview of the positivity trends in childcare facilities
Three-week overview of the positivity trends in childcare facilities

**Weekly Comparison of Tests Completed in Schools**

The graph below provides a week to week view of the levels of testing and % increase/decrease of testing completed in Schools and Special Education settings.

- In the last week (week 11, 14th – 20th March 2021), there were over 4,000 tests completed.
**Weekly Comparison of Tests Completed in Childcare facilities**

The graph provides a week to week view of the levels of testing and % increase/decrease of testing completed in Childcare Facilities.

- In the last week, (week 11, 14th – 20th March 2021), there were c.1,236 tests completed.
Recruitment

Recruitment of staff to support swabbing activity and contact tracing activity is ongoing.

As of the 22nd of March, a total of 762 swabbers have been hired and placed to support swabbing activity. As of the 22nd of March, there is a total of 825 staff supporting contact tracing. Of these 825 staff, 759 have been hired and retained as part of the dedicated workforce to support the contact tracing function. The remaining 66 staff are deployed staff from the HSE and other public service roles.