

Title:

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Action required:

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

Approved for future publication: YES/NO (remove as applicable)

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Testing and Tracing updated for NPHE, 29th of October

Updates are provided below regarding the following aspects of Testing and Contact Tracing:

- 1) Activity levels across sampling, laboratory testing and contact tracing,
- 2) End-to-end turnaround times,
- 3) Support services for delayed tests,
- 4) Process improvements,
- 5) Serial Testing Programme,
- 6) Future Service Model: Testing and Tracing,
- 7) Current challenges and issues.

1. Activity levels across sampling, laboratory and contact tracing

Sampling in the community and in acute settings.

Over the past seven days, 20th – 26th of October, there has been approximately 112,156 swabs taken for COVID-19 testing. Over 72,307 of these were taken in the community, the majority were performed at fixed testing sites and a portion as home visits which have increased in recent weeks. Approximately 20,208 swabs were taken in acute settings. The remaining 19,641 swabs taken were taken as part of the Serial Testing programmes of staff in residential care facilities for older persons and staff in food production plants.

Please note; data from 18th October – 24th October shows that the 0-10 age group makes up 16.2 % of all referrals, a slight increase from last week where this age group made up 14.5% of all referrals. The age group with the highest percentage of referrals from 18th October – 24th October is the 11-20 age group, making up 19% of all referrals. The detected rate of this 11-20 age group, from this sample of 18th October – 24th October is 8%.

Laboratory Testing

There have been over 111,660 lab tests completed in the past seven days. Approximately 85,606 of these tests were processed in community laboratories and 26,054 processed in acute laboratories.

Contact Tracing

Last week, a total of 41,552 calls were made in the Contact Tracing Centres. A total of 10,516 of these were Call 1s which involves the communication of a detected result. A total of 31,036 calls were completed relating to contact tracing.

Over the past seven days, the average number of close contacts per case was 3.9, a slight decrease from last week where the average number of close contacts per case was 4.4.

There are four contact tracing centres currently in operation to support the contact tracing work, these are open in Galway, UCD, Limerick and Cork. Overall staffing has been increased to meet increased demand in line with our triggers and escalation plan.

2. Turnaround Times (21st – 27th of October)

End-to-end turnaround time

Both detected and not detected results are now being communicated by SMS. This enhancement made to the test and trace system has resulted in an improved turnaround time from referral to communication of a detected result. 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, 21st – 27th of October;

The median end-to-end turnaround time for not detected tests in the community setting was 2 days.

The median turnaround time for time from referral to communication of a detected result in community settings was 2 days.

The median end-to-end turnaround time for detected cases in the community is 3.8 days. In the last three days this has reduced further to 2.3 days as we have significantly reduced the contact tracing turnaround times.

Overall Swab to laboratory result communicated - Medians

- 28 hours in Acute
- 28 hours in Serial Testing
- 29 hours in Community

Referral to appointment

In the community, the median time for community referral to appointment was 0.8 days.

93% of GP referrals are provided a swabbing appointment same day or next day.

Swab to lab result

For swabs processed in a community lab, the median time for swab to lab result was 26 hours.

For swabs processed in a hospital lab the median time for swab to lab result was 17 hours.

The combined median time from swab to lab result was 26 hours.

Contact Tracing:

The median time to complete all calls for contact tracing, from the 21st – 27th of October was 1.8 days. In the last 3 days this has fallen to 1 day – which is our target metric.

There has been a large increase in the number of calls being made, with an increase of 13,826 calls on last weeks volumes.

3. Support services for delayed tests - Delayed Test Result Search Service for GPs, members of the public and HSE staff/healthcare workers. A result is considered delayed if not received within 3 days of having had a COVID-19 test.

GPs

In collaboration with the ICGP, there is now an established email service for GPs whereby GPs can submit their query using a password protected form in respect of a delayed test result. Results are communicated to both the GP and patient.

- In the last seven days (Oct 19th – Oct 25th), 22 queries have been received.
- This has decreased from last week where 31 queries were received. (29%↓ decrease)
- This has also decreased in comparison to the last thirty days, where 28 queries were received weekly on average. (21%↓ decrease)
- A total of 82% of queries received in the last seven days were fully resolved within the 24-hour target.

HSELive

If a member of the public has been waiting longer than three days for a test result, they can contact HSELive on 1850 24 1850. The HSELive team will take all the required details and will send this information to the Delayed Test Result Search Service. The Search Service will get back to the caller directly and aims to complete searches within 24 hours of the @HSELive call.

- In the last seven days (Oct 19th – Oct 25th), 2106 queries have been received.
- This has increased from last week where 1614 queries were received. (30 % ↑ Increase)
- This has also increased in comparison to the last thirty days, where 1407 weekly queries were received on average. (49 % ↑ Increase)
- A total of 97% of queries received in the last seven days were fully resolved within the 24-hour target.

Healthcare Workers & HSE Occupational Health

Staff can enquire about their delayed test result via the Healthcare Worker Covid-19 Helpline on 1850 420 420. Queries are directed to the Delayed Test Result Search Service. Occupational Health can also direct queries to the Search Service via the GP email address using a password protected form. Results are communicated to both occupational health physician and healthcare worker.

- In the last seven days (Oct 19th – Oct 25th), 103 queries have been received.
- This has increased from last week where 74 queries were received. (39 % ↑ Increase)
- This has also increased in comparison to the last thirty days, where 69 weekly queries were received on average. (49% ↑ Increase)
- A total of 96% of queries received in the last seven days were fully resolved within the 24-hour target

4. Update on developments/process enhancements

We continue to work to improve turnaround times, consistency and our end-to-end testing pathway in general. This section presents the latest set of enhancements.

Data quality improvements

Several major improvement initiatives have been identified to improve the test and trace process. When complete, these will deliver faster results to the public, accelerate issue resolution and enhance overall operational management and effectiveness. Immediate priority improvement initiatives include standardising a process for patients who enter the system with insufficient or missing data and optimising a data flow across systems to update patient data as and when it becomes available. Work is ongoing to investigate the data flow between COVID Care Tracker (CCT) to Public Health's system (CIDR) and analysis being done on how best to automate this process. Further investigation is also underway into 'unknown' test results which are being received from acute labs with active follow up and solutions being put in place to deal with these scenarios.

Schools Testing Process

Following the return of students to primary schools, secondary schools and various after school services at the end of August there is now a demand for testing of groups of students where a detected case has been linked to a school setting. To cater for this new testing pathway both a working and steering group were set up to define a clear and concise process for schools testing. This group has developed a testing pathway, templates for data collection and communication materials with the Department of Education.

A process is currently in operation to support all ongoing schools testing including childcare facilities. As of October 27th, 731 schools have had/are having some testing completed based on a Public Health Risk Assessment. From the 731 schools that had mass tests there have been an additional 531 detected cases have been identified over and above original cases. 17,603 students and teachers have been involved in mass testing.

SMS to patients who receive a detected COVID-19 result and to confirmed close contacts

As of 12th of October, patients who receive a COVID-19 detected result, have received a text message to inform them of their result, where a valid mobile number has been provided. This is an improvement to the current process and to date, has resulted in a reduced turnaround time from referral to communication of result, ensuring individuals are notified at the earliest opportunity. The national contact tracing centre will be in contact with these individuals who receive a detected result to provide clinical guidance and to carry out relevant contact tracing as per the normal end to end process.

In addition to providing an SMS with communication of a result, as of Wednesday 21st of October, patients who have been identified as a close contact will also receive a text message, informing them

of their close contact status. The national contact tracing centre will additionally be in contact with this person, providing clinical guidance on their close contact status.

Static and pop up test centres to meet community demand for testing

Additional testing centres have been opened in areas identified where improved access to local testing was needed. This includes a large-scale testing centre which was opened in Croke Park on 12th October to improve accessibility to those requiring testing in the North City and surrounding areas. A testing centre was opened on 5th October in Galway City. There are currently 33 static community test centres with 6 pop up testing centres in operation. These pop-up centres are in Carlow town, Limerick City, Donegal town, Sandyford, Co. Dublin, Cork City and Co. Wexford. Finally, greater guidance has been provided to both HSELive Staff and to Contact Tracing Teams to encourage those who may wish to avail of home testing to understand how to travel safely to a Community Testing Centre

Recruitment drive for additional contact tracers and swabbers

The HSE is currently recruiting additional contact tracing staff and swabbing staff to meet the increasing demand. A total of 274 staff have been onboarded to date, an additional 90 staff are expected to onboard by the end of this week. We expect to continue bringing in 60 -70 new staff to the service every week over the coming period, until a point where the additional 800 tracers are in operation. A total of 180 additional people have been onboarded to date to carry out swabbing activities, whilst additional candidates are currently going through the compliance and interview process. When this recruitment drive is complete, any requirement for further resources to support the test and trace system will then be reviewed.

5. Serial Testing Programmes

Serial Testing in Residential Care Facilities (RCFs) for Older Persons

A number of improvement initiatives continue to be in place for the serial testing of all staff in RCFs. These include revised timetables for swab collections, automated reporting via dashboards, training material to support the RCFs in both swabbing and packaging of swabs and the set-up of direct access to the test referral system, for each RCFs to improve data quality.

Cycle 4 of serial testing of all staff in RCFs commenced on Wednesday, 14th of October. As of 27th of October, there has been 30,404 tests carried out, with 182 cases detected. This represents a detected rate of 0.60%.

Serial Testing in Food Production facilities

Cycle 2 of serial testing of food production facilities has commenced on 12th of October with a planned four-week cycle. As of 27th of October, Cycle 2 has carried out 8,440 tests with 72 detected cases. This represents a detected rate of 0.85%.

The HSE is working closely with internal and external stakeholders to identify and implement improvements which can be built into the serial testing programme and has increased the level of communications with food production facilities. A number of facilities have identified they will be hiring additional seasonal staff to meet the increased demand throughout November and December. This increase in staffing numbers is being factored into planning of future rounds of testing.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) have veterinary inspectors that work alongside food production facilities which are included in the serial testing programme. A new process has been designed and is being implemented for DAFM staff to manage and update their own data through the SwiftQueue system. This will enable a summary of results to be issued to the Lead Vet for each testing site.

6. Future Service model: Testing and Tracing

Implementation is continuing of the service model for Test and Trace including recruitment to enable the staffing of the service model for community swabbing, labs and contact tracing and Estate improvement in terms of a permanent and sustainable testing centre and contact centre footprint.

Progress has been made on four key areas, identified in the Future Operational model report as requiring further work, as follows:

1. Process improvements to enhance GP referral OOH evening and weekend service.
2. Plan to increase testing capacity beyond 15k per day across the end to end pathway as well as the implications in terms of cost, workforce and operational requirements.
3. Implementation of the enduring governance structures and the design and strengthening of capabilities underpinning the core functional areas and accelerated recruitment for these posts.
4. Development of core high-level service KPIs and a roadmap outlining their evolution.

The overarching priority is to conclude analyses and facilitate final engagement between the HSE and the Department of Health with respect to a decision on testing volumes and associated costs. In addition, from an operational perspective the focus is on developing and mobilising all projects across the pathway in line with the stated model improvements.

7. Update on any key challenges/issues

1. There continues to be an increasing demand for tests in the community. There are a number of actions which are in place to address this demand. These actions include continued expansion of opening hours at testing centres, augmentation of resources at testing centres and deployment of pop up testing centres in various areas of the country. The HSE is currently recruiting additional swabbers, over the past four weeks, an additional 180 swabbers have been onboarded.
2. The proportion of complex cases to routine cases has increased and this is likely to continue as increased mass testing in congregated settings is required. This presents a risk that the demands on Public Health Departments who manage complex cases will increase beyond available capacity. The bulk testing protocol and ongoing public health alignment initiatives are designed to mitigate this risk.
3. As the number of detected cases increase, this is placing a significant demand on our national contact tracing centre. In order to meet this demand, a recruitment drive is underway and is an example of actions we are taking in response to critically assessing the demand on the test and trace system. The HSE is currently recruiting additional contact tracing staff; the first 827 people are through the interview process and a total of 274 staff have been onboarded to date, an additional 90 staff are expected to onboard by the end of this week. We expect to continue bringing in 60-70 new staff to the service every week over the coming period, until a point where the additional 800 tracers are in operation. Any requirement for further recruitment will then be reviewed.
4. The test appointment queue continues to increase and specifically, the list for patients requesting home tests through NAS is also increasing. Given the current wait period of for a home test, as well as a return to a regular schedule for NAS, there is an increasing pressure on the system that is impacting those who genuinely require a home test. A number of actions have been taken to address this challenge. These actions include the opening of additional pop up test centres and the provision of greater clarity and guidance to members of the public on how to safely travel to a Test Centre – new information has been posted on HSE.ie and additional guidance has been issued to GPs.
5. The resumption of schools continues to drive increased demand for testing. This is an additional and considerable strain on Public Health Departments who take the lead when assessing risks in a school setting in the case of a confirmed case or a confirmed or suspected outbreak. To mitigate this, there is an enhanced testing pathway for schools in operation. The overall aim of this testing pathway is to ensure that testing at schools follows a single consistent process, that tests can be grouped (such that results come back in a batch and can be clearly lined to the specific school for follow-up) and that increased administrative support is made available to public health.