Title: Test and Trace Paper – NPHET

Author: Niamh O’Beirne

Organisation: HSE

Date: 18th October 2021

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

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

- Demand for Testing and Tracing remains high. Over the last 7 days the positivity rate is highest in County Kerry at 16.3% (this is over 18% in Community testing). The second highest positivity rate over the past 7 days for County Carlow is 14.3% and third is Meath with a 12.2% positivity rate.

- From the 08th – 14th October, there were c.114,049 community referrals. Overall, total referrals have increased by 6% in comparison to the same time-period last week while positivity has increased to c.11.4%.

- From 08th – 14th October, there were:
  - 323 international travel portal referrals (↓ 60% compared to last week)
  - 77,283 self-referrals (↑ 8.05% compared to last week)
  - 13,507 GP referrals (↑ 0.16% compared to last week)

- From the 07th – 13th October, the group with the largest number of referrals was the 4-12 age group. The detected rate for the 4-12 age group is 9.39%.
• Below is the volume of testing in three age groups under 18, and the number of positive cases. Overall, more than 38,280 tests were done, with 2,826 positive in this age group.

Table 1: Breakdown comparison in weeks 30th Sept. – 6th Oct and 7th – 13th Oct:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 3 yrs</td>
<td>10,239</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>11,662 (↑12%)</td>
<td>441 (↑31% increasing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 12 yrs</td>
<td>17,761</td>
<td>1,294</td>
<td>19,252 (↑8%)</td>
<td>1,807 (↑28% increasing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 – 17 yrs</td>
<td>8,050</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>7,366 (↓9%)</td>
<td>578 (↑15% increasing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Over the last 7 days, the total number of community swabs has increased by 5.4% (c. 106,265 from 8th – 14th October, compared to c.100,840 (from the 1st – 7th October). The highest community swabbing day over the past week reached c.19,186 swabs.

• Over the past week, c. 94% of people received a swabbing appointment in less than 24 hours. The median time to get access to swabbing is 0.2 days. The trend in respect of time to get a swabbing appointment in less than 24 hours has exceeded the target since mid-January 2021.

• From the 7th – 13th October, there have been approximately 142,356 lab tests reported in community, private and acute labs. As a consequence of the cyber-attack, a partial view of acute laboratories has been included until data for all acute laboratories becomes available.

• In the community, over the last 7 days (8th – 14th October), the median end-to-end turnaround time from referral to:
  - SMS for not detected tests was 1.0 day
  - Communication of a detected result by call was 1.3 days
  - Contact tracing completed, for detected results was 2.1 days

• Of those tested with close contacts during the same 7-day period, the average number of close contacts was 3.5.

• From the 8th - 14th October, there were:
  - 11,393 call 1s (↑26% compared to last week)
  - 11,293 call 2s (↑26% compared to last week)
  - 19,380 call 3s (↑12% compared to last week)

• A policy change was advised by NPHET whereby the routine testing and contact tracing of asymptomatic children aged between 3 months and 13 years in early learning, school age childcare and education settings ceased with effect from Monday 27th September 2021. With the revised policy context, in the week beginning 27th September, there has been a significant reduction in the demand for schools’ referrals.
Serial Testing Programmes:

- Of the 616 total facilities that were previously part of the RCF Serial Testing Programme, 426 (70%) have been removed over the last number of months. This is due to meeting the removal criteria as agreed by Public Health and the RCF submitting their declaration to be removed. A total of 190 facilities currently remain on the programme.

- Serial testing of staff in RCFs commenced on 20th June 2020. To date, 873,800 swabs have been completed in 598 facilities, identifying 5,092 detected cases, resulting in an 0.58% detection rate since the beginning of testing.

- Cycle 16 commenced on 13th September. To date, the cycle has completed 9,523 swabs and identified 84 detected cases. This results in a 0.88% detection rate.

- The volumes of testing completed as part of the serial testing programme have reduced over the life cycle of the programme due to a lower number of RCF’s now participating in this programme as a result of meeting the removal criteria submitting a declaration for removal. This is evident when comparing current cycle volumes to those completed in Cycle 7. As per the graph below, Cycle 7 commenced in January 2021, there were 113,443 swabs completed in 584 facilities and 2,249 detected cases and the overall detection rate for Cycle 7 was 1.98%.

- Serial Testing of Staff in Mental Health Facilities commenced on 21st of January 2021. To date, 8,697 swabs have been completed in 93 facilities, identifying 26 detected cases, resulting in a 0.30% detection rate.
• Cycle 10 commenced on the 11th of October. To date, 11 swabs have been completed in 1 facility, identifying 0 detected case. This results in a 0.00% detection rate.

• The volumes of testing completed as part of the serial testing programme for mental health facilities has reduced over the life cycle of the programme, this is due to a lower number of facilities now taking part in this programme as a result of submitting a declaration for removal and meeting the vaccination guideline. This is evident when comparing current cycle volumes to those completed in Cycle 1. As per the graph below, Cycle 1 commenced in January 2021, there were 2,139 swabs completed in 49 facilities and 12 cases detected. The overall detection rate for this cycle was 0.56%

• Serial Testing of Staff in Food Production Facilities commenced on 21st of August 2020. To date, 263,080 swabs have been completed in 91 facilities, identifying 1,866 detected cases, resulting in a 0.71% detection rate since the beginning of testing.

• Cycle 14 commenced on 20th September. To date, 7,774 swabs have been completed in 66 facilities, identifying 100 detected cases. This results in a 1.29% detection rate.

• In comparison, Cycle 1 commenced on August 21st 2020. There were 30,262 swabs completed in 83 facilities, identifying 128 detected cases. This resulted in a 0.42% detection rate.
• Recruitment of staff to support swabbing and contact tracing is ongoing. As of the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021, 805 contact tracing staff have been hired and placed. Of the 805 contact tracing staff, 769 have been hired and retained as part of the dedicated workforce supporting contact tracing function whilst the 36 remaining are deployed staff from the HSE and other public service roles.
2.0 Update on Testing initiatives

1. **Alternative Pathways for Testing:**
   - There is currently only one Pop-up walk-in centre operational in Blanchardstown (Dublin)
   - Activity remains high for all self-referrals - c. 254 people per day are attending as walk-ins, and an average of 10,871 per day are booking appointments via the online portal. The overall positivity rate is 9% from these cohorts.
   - Activity for day 5 testing through the travel portal is currently c. 52 tests per day. This Activity is for the period Oct 7 - Oct 13.

2. **Antigen testing results**

   The online system for reporting antigen test results went live on 16th September. It can be accessed via a web link [http://hse.ie/reportantigenresult](http://hse.ie/reportantigenresult) or by scanning a QR code. Users of the system include:
   - Participants in HSE antigen programmes (RCF, Childcare, Further education) who are entering both positive and negative results
   - Users not associated with HSE programmes and general public – these users are entering mostly positive results because they are captured as part of the online booking process for PCR tests

To date 11,989 results have been entered with an average of 610 per day for the last 7 days. The breakdown of these is shown in the table below. Antigen test results, symptomatic status and vaccination status are self-reported and not subject to validation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negative antigen</th>
<th>Positive antigen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number reported</td>
<td>Symptomatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,794</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Approach to Antigen testing pilot in early childcare and third level**

   The antigen programme for Early childcare and 3rd level education has been running since 26th July. 29 facilities have been involved in the programme to date - 24 have completed 4 weeks of testing (5 Further and Higher Education and 19 Childcare) and 10 are undertaking another 4 weeks of the programme (2 Further and Higher Education and 8 Childcare). A total of 5 additional Higher Education sites will start testing from this week onwards. An evaluation of the programme based on the first group of sites (n=14) has been completed and is currently with stakeholders for review.

   A number of sites were still reporting results manually up to 1st October. The total results reported manually consist of 2,141 negative, 3 positive and 14 Invalid. The positive antigen results were all confirmed as positive Covid-19 cases on PCR testing. Results reported online since 16th September are shown in the table below – results reported via this pathway include antigen users from the HSE programmes as well as other antigen users in the sectors not associated with the HSE testing programmes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Negative antigen</th>
<th>Positive antigen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number reported</td>
<td>Symptomatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further and higher education</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early learning and childcare</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Antigen staff self-testing in Residential Care Facilities (RCFs)
A staff self-testing programme in Residential Care Facilities (RCFs) for Older Persons has been developed under the guidance of some of the Directors of Public Health. The programme will run for 4 weeks initially in facilities in Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Wicklow and Dublin North City and County. Its aim is to test the operational feasibility of using antigen self-testing within this sector as a tool to support case finding and potentially contribute to the reduction in the number or size of outbreaks, alongside other tools such as vaccination and infection prevention and control measures. Testing commenced from 20th September onwards with 52 RCFs registered to date. Of these, 40 have commenced testing and reporting results via the online system, with 2,998 negative results and 2 positive results reported by participating sites.

5. Antigen Test Kit Distribution
There are a number of pathways to support the distribution of antigen test kits to potential user groups, as outlined below.

5.1 Home Delivery Model
A home delivery model has been developed using a third-party provider and the postal service, which can be activated to deliver antigen test kits directly to people in their homes if required. While this model was originally developed with close contacts in mind, this model could also be adapted for other user groups, with the development of a booking portal to allow users to request an antigen test kit to be delivered to their home.

5.2 Pharmacy Distribution
The possibility of distributing antigen test kits through the pharmacy network is also currently being explored. The proposed pathway is to enable users to collect an antigen test kit from their local pharmacy upon receipt of a code/identifier. The code could be presented by the user to the pharmacy, validated by the pharmacist and the data recorded. This model could potentially be rolled out as an additional distribution route and would likely take a couple of months to develop and implement with engagement from key stakeholders. Several areas such as information technology solutions, costs and logistics need further investigation and review.
6. **Antigen Testing: A View across other countries**

**France**

- Free antigen testing is to stop from October 15th. After this date, only tests done for medical reasons - i.e. people with symptoms, who are close contacts and other key groups - will be free. When obtaining an antigen test you will need a prescription if you are unvaccinated while no prescription will be needed if you are vaccinated against COVID-19.

- Antigen testing will still be free for fully vaccinated citizens who need one to travel abroad. The need for these has dramatically decreased however, as those that are vaccinated do not need an antigen when travelling within the EU.

- Tests will remain free for under 18s in all circumstances, with widespread testing in schools set to continue. Antigen tests will continue to remain available on a walk-in basis at pharmacies across France, with a cap of between €25–€30 per test set for those who will have to pay after October 15th.

- Link: https://www.thelocal.fr/20210927/france-to-end-free-covid-tests-for-all-in-october/

**Germany**

- Germany has recently moved away from offering antigen tests free of charge to the general public and are now charging for their use. Tests are still free for children under 12, people who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons and for those who need a test to be released from quarantine after having had COVID-19 and other key groups.

- The cost of antigen tests is around €15 across Germany. The move is to encourage more vaccinations across the country. Pregnant people will still be able to get free antigen tests until the end of the year at which point, they will have to pay for them after that.

- Link: https://www.macaubusiness.com/this-is-going-to-hurt-charges-for-virus-tests-across-europe/?__cf_chl_managed_tk__=pmd_msrXqlSbfNzVpR08cglmsaKNriFRQ1Pnc_sJ0x9FmA-1634213730-0-gqNtZGzNA1CjnBszRQ9

- Link: https://www.thelocal.de/20211011/germany-ends-free-rapid-covid-19-tests-for-all/

**Denmark**

- Antigen tests continue to be free of charge for the public in Denmark distributed through pharmacies.

- Link: https://www.macaubusiness.com/this-is-going-to-hurt-charges-for-virus-tests-across-europe/?__cf_chl_managed_tk__=pmd_msrXqlSbfNzVpR08cglmsaKNriFRQ1Pnc_sJ0x9FmA-1634213730-0-gqNtZGzNA1CjnBszRQ9

**Austria**

- Antigen tests continue to be free of charge for the public in Austria through pharmacies.
• Link: https://www.macaubusiness.com/this-is-going-to-hurt-charges-for-virus-tests-across-europe/?__cf_chl_managed_tk__=pmd_msrXqIJ5bfNzVpR08cglmsaKNriFRQ1Pnc_sJ0x9FmHA-1634213730-0-gqNtZGzNA1CjcnBszRQ9

Scotland

• General public present at pharmacy and provide their CHI (Community Health Index) number - used for payment and MHRA traceability requirements

• Pharmacy will use the Universal Claim Framework functionality in the same way as they currently do for supplying any medication to enter the relevant information and submit a claim to indicate the collection of antigen kits

• C-19 lateral flow device distribution service: PSNC Main site

England

• General public register for a 16-digit collect code via gov.uk/get-collect-code and present this at local pharmacy

• Pharmacy records 16 digit code along with the lot number for the test packs handed out, the number of test packs handed out and the date of the collection and retained for 6 months

• 119 can provide support to individuals (including those without internet access) on use of the kit, resolving any problems and reporting results

• Test kits are supplied free of charge to the pharmacy

• C-19 lateral flow device distribution service: PSNC Main site