

COVID 19 - Testing Demand & Supply

March 23, 2020

Introduction

At the NPHEM meeting on Thursday 12th March a decision to change the case definition was agreed in response to evolving patterns emerging from surveillance. This extended criteria were implemented from Monday 16th March and resulted in a significant increase in the number of people referred for testing.

There is currently a backlog for COVID 19 tests and this is accumulating, due to the large and growing number of referrals received on a daily basis. This was also hindered by the existing capacity of the different elements across the pathway; access to testing, laboratory capacity and testing equipment.

Significant attention and resources have been applied to the management of the testing pathway for COVID 19 to address these issues.

Current Status

Testing Sites

- As of Monday 23rd March 2020, the capacity to conduct swabbing / tests was increased to 4,500 per day with 41 Community Testing Clinics nationally by Tuesday, 24th March.
- NAS has the capacity to complete 350 tests per day.

Test kit/swabs

- As of Monday 23rd March 2020, currently distributing stock of 35,000 swabs nationally.
- 10,000 alternative swabs (dry with saline) are also in use.
- 20,000 swabs currently received through weekly delivery.

Laboratory Capacity

- As of Monday 23rd March 2020, the capacity to assess tests in laboratory per day is 2,500.

System Constraints

Test kit / swabs

- The current supply line of swabs / test kits means <3k patients can be swabbed per day regardless of site throughput.

- This current supply volume will hinder test capacity due to on-going swab shortages before month end.

Laboratory Capacity

- As testing capacity increases, this will place additional pressure on the laboratory capacity.

Strategy Going Forward

Testing Sites

- Target to achieve 10,000 tests per day by Friday 27th March 2020.

Test kit / swab

- The testing process will require an additional supply of swabs per week in order to maintain throughout at proposed test centres.
- Additional weekly bulk supplies of swabs are currently being explored from China.

Laboratory Capacity

- The capacity growth will be expanded significantly by Enfer and Acute Hospitals to a projected capacity of 16,000 per day; however this will not be realised until late April.

Contingency Plan

- Ensure all potential access to laboratory capacity is robustly explored to enhance additional capacity already sourced.
- Review current backlog to ensure risk categories are identified and tested and prioritised based on greatest public health need.
- Review the current process of referral for test to ensure people in high risk categories are captured and provided with test appointments.
- Issue communication to people currently waiting to access a test advising that we have their request, reinforcing clinical advice regarding self-isolation and self-care.
- Consideration will be given to what corresponding activities should be implemented with respect to surveillance.