

Capacity Q&A for Regional Coordinators
27/08/20

Q: Is there an underlying issue with processing capability?

This is not a problem of swabbing capacity, but it's a question of lab processing. We have to predict how many swabs will return to labs each day and sometimes we get a few less than expected (where lab utilisation might be lower) and some where it is higher (where we get excess utilisation and a roll-over). This is not a precise science as we are forecasting human behaviour.

Due to high demand we have been running high lab utilisation and rollover in processing volumes.

Q: What prioritisation are you doing? We need more information on this

To ensure we are prioritising areas with high prevalence we are using the JBC analysis of high-risk areas, recognising that testing strategies are different in different outbreak areas. In addition, we prioritise the actions determined by the Directors of Public Health in outbreak areas to support their local testing strategies.

We are also prioritising testing in adult social care, ensuring we meet our commitments to complete regular whole home retesting.

Q: Access to local pillar 2 testing facilities is being restricted centrally meaning symptomatic people cannot get tested. Please provide LRFs with an urgent response to this ongoing issue.

A: We are currently experiencing high levels of demand across the testing network. We are allocating testing capacity based on areas of greatest need, such as prioritising areas of high prevalence, and we continue to expand testing capacity doubling the daily COVID-19 testing capacity to 500,000 by the end of October. We are closely managing the availability of test appointments in line with our ability to process tests and return a result. Whilst we build our laboratory capacity, we will continue to manage this closely to ensure that symptomatic individuals are able to access testing.

Q: There are issues with both testing labs (lack of staff causing delays) and availability of testing kits which has led to rationing being undertaken. Could an update be provided on these issues please?

A: Whilst there were challenges with resourcing at the labs whilst we transitioned from volunteer to established workforce, this has largely been removed. There is no issue with the availability of test kits at this point in time, and most channels have more available inventory than has been the case for many weeks.

Q: Can an update be provided on the position of Mobile Testing Units.

A: The mobile test units continue to be deployed under the direction of RCG/LRF groups. The initial challenges experienced as we migrated from military to civil service central staffing, and to commercial operations have been largely addressed and we are seeing more stable operations. The challenges that we are currently facing are primarily demand oriented in that we have limited processing capacity, leading to restricted bookings in some low prevalence areas

Q: Was the demand curve not expected to be like this? Is there modelling for the future and could this be a similar effect when the vaccination is rolled out in the future?

A: We did not foresee the substantial increase in demand in Scotland as schools returned and the growth of asymptomatic demand such as that created by international travellers. However, we continue to refine our models and plans to ensure that we are sized correctly for the winter period and the growth in testing.

Q: Is there sufficient capacity for testing/home test to cope with the potential RWCS including lab testing.

A: DHSC are building towards a winter plan that has been approved at senior level, and DHSC expect to be able to build lab and swab capacity to meet demand as we progress.

Q: Is there a plan to address additional demand that universities are going to create, on top of schools?

A: The current policy is not to test university students asymptotically. DHSC are reviewing the testing network to ensure alignment with university locations.

Q: Given that young people are not compliant with guidance, it will be a testing time for new students attending university in the autumn.

A: Yes, there is a recognised risk of university students in fresher's week not complying with guidelines. Universities UK are looking at this to try to 'dampen' exuberance, but this is a difficult and ongoing process. We continue to review the placement of city-based testing facilities to address the potential symptomatic demands that students and citizens will see as we move into the winter period.