

## Media Release

**Date: 27 December 2021**

### Increased reliance on LFTs as States announces changes to testing strategy

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As a result of increasing COVID-19 cases since the identification of the Omicron variant in the Bailiwick, the Medical Officer of Health has today announced changes to how we will manage testing capacity with an increased reliance on lateral flow tests.

As we are now in an Omicron wave of infection, it is possible that our ability to manage cases of COVID-19 effectively could become overwhelmed. We must ensure this does not happen so the decision has been taken to streamline processes and primarily focus PCR testing capacity on surveillance testing in high-risk situations, and testing of health and care staff, and staff serving other parts of our critical infrastructures. This forms part of our business continuity planning and something that we anticipated may occur.

As part of this business continuity planning, from today community testing will be primarily focused on utilising LFTs, which have been proven to be a very reliable diagnostic method.

Islanders are asked to support this change in testing strategy by taking an LFT should they become symptomatic. If this is negative, they should book a PCR test. Additionally, it remains strongly recommended that islanders take regular LFTs for surveillance purposes. Guidance on the use of LFTs can be found at [Lateral Flow Testing \(LFT\) | States of Guernsey - COVID-19 \(gov.gg\)](#).

The process for anyone receiving a positive LFT result is:

- You must immediately notify the States of Guernsey via either the clinical helpline (01481 220001 or 01481 220002) or the online form at <https://www.gov.gg/covidnotification>
- You will receive confirmation that you must now self-isolate for 10 days, with a reduction in self-isolation if you are symptom-free and test LFT negative on days 6 and 7. This confirmation will include all the necessary legal requirements and advice, including the steps that must be followed if you are able to release yourself from isolation after day 7.
- PCR tests will no longer be used to confirm positive cases where a positive LFT exists.
- You will be asked to notify close contacts that they are requested to take an LFT daily for 10 days, while also limiting their social contacts during this time.

If you are symptomatic and have a negative LFT then please contact the clinical helpline on (01481 220001 or 01481 220002) or complete the online form at <https://www.gov.gg/covidnotification> as you may still be referred for a PCR test depending on your symptoms.

Dr Nicola Brink, Medical Officer of Health, said:

‘In the days leading up to Christmas we started to see significant increases in the number of positive cases. While we only sequence 10 random cases a day, we were seeing that 80 - 90% of these were Omicron. This tells me that we are now in our Omicron wave and we should expect large numbers of cases in the coming weeks. During that time, we must continue to do everything we can to slow the spread of the virus and streamline the management of cases. We simply don’t have the resources to effectively manage such significant case numbers while also scheduling everyone for PCR tests and handling all the necessary contact tracing. We have to prioritise what we do to ensure that our measures are as effective as possible in the face of an Omicron wave of infection.

‘As such we are pivoting our testing strategy to focus community testing on lateral flow tests, relying on the high levels of accuracy of these devices. We’re asking islanders to continue using LFTs, we have significant supplies that are available for collection from the Guernsey Information Centre, both as part of routine surveillance – so before you go out to an event for example – and if you’re symptomatic. Any positive LFT result must be reported to us with the individual then put into self-isolation. We really need the community’s support, by everyone continuing to do the right thing, to help us slow the spread of this variant. We simply cannot afford to have huge numbers of people, particularly those delivering essential services, catch the virus at the same time. The island will struggle to continue running if that happens.’