

Media Release

Date: 29 March 2022

Further changes to island's COVID-19 testing strategy

Further changes are being made to the island's COVID-19 testing strategy as we continue moving forward while living responsibly with the virus.

The changes will come into effect from this Friday (1st April).

PCR testing

Following the removal earlier this month of confirmatory PCR tests after an LFT positive, there will be a further scaling back on the use of PCRs.

PCR testing will now only be available in limited circumstances. These are when people are admitted to vulnerable settings such as the hospital (including those presenting with respiratory symptoms), prison or care homes. This is a planned step following the removal of regulations and is part of the proportionate removal of measures. It is aligned with plans to remove the testing tents at the PEH and East Arm shortly.

This means that outside of healthcare settings, PCR tests will no longer be available for people who are symptomatic but testing LFT negative.

Pre-travel PCR testing will continue to be available via GP practices. Islanders are also advised to research options in UK hub airports if these more suit their travel needs.

Lateral flow tests

Community testing for islanders who are symptomatic but not requiring clinical care will continue to be primarily focused on using LFTs, which have been proven to be a reliable diagnostic method.

Testing for those in Education remains unchanged up to the Easter break. Measures required after the Easter holiday will be considered over the coming weeks.

We continue to have supplies of LFTs for islanders to collect free of charge as-and-when they are running low. We would again ask people to not stockpile them and staff at

collection points will continue seeking clarification should anyone ask for more than one box per person. This has been the case for several months now.

This is important as we must maximise the use of our existing stocks of LFTs, as the UK Government has confirmed that we will not receive any further supplies free-of-charge.

We will further review our guidance on the use of LFTs towards the end of April, but islanders are asked to LFT in the following circumstances only:

- If you're symptomatic (if the first test is negative, please repeat after 24 hours)
- If you're the household contact of a positive cases (LFT for seven days). Non-household contacts do not need to test unless symptomatic
- If you're visiting someone vulnerable
- If you're going to an event or large gathering

Positive cases are still asked to complete the online referral form at <https://www.gov.gg/covidnotification> or call 01481 220001/220002 to register their positive result.

Business testing

We are aware that some businesses have policies in place asking/expecting staff to LFT regularly, or even daily, before attending work. This practice is not aligned with current guidance.

Until now, businesses have been able to apply for packs of LFTs for their staff to use. Due to the need to preserve existing LFT stocks and ensure they are used appropriately; businesses will no longer be able to receive packs of LFTs from the States.

Dr Nicola Brink, Medical Officer of Health, said:

'As we continue moving forwards and towards a more "normal" existence of living responsibly with COVID-19, and therefore managing infections in line with how we manage other respiratory tract infections, it was always our intention to further scale back the use of PCRs. We cannot maintain the testing tents forever nor the demands on the Pathology Laboratory.

'We've been incredibly grateful for the support we've had from the UK Government throughout the pandemic, especially regarding the supply of LFT packs free-of-charge and COVID-19 vaccines. This has been fantastic, but it is understandable, given decisions in the UK about its own testing strategy, that we will no longer receive those LFT packs. We have healthy supplies of LFTs currently, but we need to manage them, which means no stockpiling by the community. We also needed to stop providing LFTs to businesses for use by their staff as we are focusing on symptomatic testing, protecting of vulnerable people and mitigations to minimise the risk of superspreading events.

'We would therefore ask islanders to continue doing LFTs where is it appropriate to do so. This is when you're symptomatic, visiting someone vulnerable or heading to an event. We will further review our use of LFTs later in April.'

Ends