***Subject: Temporary suspension of confirmatory PCR – Policy update***

***Key messages that follow national guidance:***

* *Due to the high prevalence of coronavirus infections in England, confirmatory testing will be temporarily removed for LFD tests taken at most asymptomatic test sites (exceptions below) until prevalence lowers again. This change is due to take place on 27 January 2021.*
* *Prevalence of infections throughout England is currently above 1% and is expected to remain at these levels for at least 2 months. PHE recommends that as COVID-19 prevalence rate is above 1%, the performance (positive predictive value – PPV – the probability that an individual with a positive test result really has viral loads likely to correlate with infectiousness) of Innova LFDs and PCRs is broadly comparable for measuring viral loads infectiousness and expected to be indistinguishable when used at test sites, significantly reducing the need for routine PCR confirmatory testing.*
* *At times of higher prevalence, the proportion of false positives will fall. While prevalence rates are above 1% LFD and PCR testing have broadly comparable rates of probability that an individual with a positive test result really has viral loads likely to correlate with infectiousness. For example:* 
  + *At 0.8% prevalence PCR PPV is 71% and LFD PPV is 68%*
  + *At 1% prevalence PCR PPV is 75% and LFD PPV is 73%.*
  + *At 2% prevalence PCR PPV is 86% and LFD PPV is 85%.*
* *Confirmatory testing was introduced to reduce the number of people self-isolating unnecessarily after receiving a false positive result from LFD tests. This is because in areas of prevalence lower than 1%, there is a higher likelihood of false positive results.*
* *Positive LFD results will trigger the legal duty to self-isolate, self-isolation payments and contact tracing. LFD testing offers a significant advantage in allowing for more rapid isolation of infectious people and contact tracing. (See LFD top lines/narrative.)*
* *In line with clinical advice, confirmatory PCR testing will remain for NHS England staff and in Adult Social Care, where the test is taken as part of an asymptomatic testing workplace programme and results are registered using a self-reporting tool. It will also remain for primary school workers where testing is done at home, but not for secondary school workers who take tests at school. Utilising confirmatory PCR in settings that use a self-reporting tool will minimise the risk that incorrectly reported positive results are registered. Confirmatory PCR testing will also be used for vaccine and LFD testing surveillance, genome sequencing and for self-administered tests.*
* *Confirmatory PCR will continue for:* 
  + *NHS England staff*
  + *Adult Social Care*
  + *Primary school workers who test at home*
  + *Hauliers*
  + *(Those in pilots using self-test reporting tools)*
* *Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will continue to use confirmatory PCR testing, in accordance with the decisions of their Chief Medical Officers. The Devolved Administrations set out the criteria for testing eligibility in their nations.  Health is a devolved matter, and it is for each of the 4 nations of the UK to decide on their own testing policy.*

***FAQs:***

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| ***Question*** | ***Answer*** |
| *Previously I was told I needed to take a confirmatory test after a positive LFD result. Why has this changed?* | *A positive LFT result is less likely to be a false positive the more COVID-19 there is in the population. Currently, COVID-19 rates are high so a positive LFD result is less likely to be a false positive than it would have been a few months ago when COVID-19 rates were a lot lower. For this reason, we currently do not require people who test positive using LFD tests to confirm their result with a PCR test.* |
| *How accurate is the LFT?* | *Antigen lateral flow tests are highly specific, which means that only a small proportion of people who do not have coronavirus will receive a positive result.*  *Extensive clinical evaluation from Public Health England and the University of Oxford shows that lateral flow tests are appropriate for large-scale population testing, including for asymptomatic people.* |
| *How do I get my LFD test result?* | *Your result will be available within 30 mins of taking the test. They are point of care tests, so don’t need to go to a lab to be processed. Your result will be sent to you via SMS and/or e-mail. Results will be communicated at latest within a day of the test.*  *You are legally obliged to self-isolate following a positive LFD test result.* |
| *Will people who test positive on one of these rapid tests face fines if they don’t self-isolate? Will they be eligible for the £500 self-isolation payment?* | *From 27 January 2021, LFD test positive results will legally confirm diagnosis of coronavirus and activate legal obligations to self-isolate and the ability to claim the Test & Trace Support Payment for those not self-reporting.*  *Before this date, a confirmatory PCR test was required.* |
| *What if I take a PCR test after getting an LFD test result and the result is different?* | *Your LFD test result will be used for qualification for Test & Trace self-isolation payments, contact tracing and legal requirement of self-isolation, not a PCR result, unless your test is within Adult Social Care or you work at the NHS or at a primary school and have taken a test as part of an asymptomatic testing workplace programme.* |
| *When am I legally obligated to self-isolate?* | *You are legally obliged to self-isolate following a positive LFD test result. Follow the latest government guidance on self-isolation.* |
| *Why going forward is your policy X over Y?* | *Due to the prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) increasing to over 1% in the tested population, PHE advised that confirmatory tests should no longer be required following a positive LFD test result at most test sites (exceptions in top lines).*  *When there was lower prevalence of the virus in the UK, and after initially introducing widespread use of LFD tests in community settings, we required a confirmatory test to be taken to confirm the presence of the virus after a positive LFD test result.* |
| *What if I take two tests with different results? (for those not in the below groups)* | * *You should not be taking 2 tests****unless explicitly instructed to do so****.* * *If your first LFD test is negative and your second LFD test is positive you must follow government self-isolation guidance from the result of the positive LFD test.* * *If your first LFD test is positive and you take a second LFD test which is negative, you must follow government self-isolation guidance from the result of the positive LFD result. You cannot use one LFD result to validate or invalidate another.* * *If your LFD test is positive and you take a PCR which is negative, you must follow government self-isolation guidance from the result of the positive LFD test.* * *If your PCR test is positive and you take a LFD test which is negative, you must follow government guidance and self-isolate from the result of the positive PCR test.* * *If your PCR test is negative and you take a LFD test which is positive, you must follow government self-isolation advice from the result of the LFD test.*     *For Adult Social Care, the NHS and those who work in primary schools: There are special arrangements for those who have regular LFD tests as part of regular asymptomatic workplace testing programme in these groups. For these groups, if your LFD test result is positive, you and your household should self-isolate and follow the steps above. You should also arrange to have a PCR test.*  *If this PCR test result is positive, you and your household must complete your full self-isolation period. If this PCR test result is negative, and you have no symptoms of COVID-19, you and your household can stop isolating.* |
| *What do you do with an inconclusive LFD test result?* | *If your LFD test result is invalid or inconclusive, you will need to take another as soon as possible.* |
| *How will contacts be traced from the LFD test result?* | *Users can input their positive LFT result into the NHS app, using a token ID from CTAS which would then trigger self-isolation and tracing. They can also register their test result online at gov.uk or use the phone number in the test kit’s instructions.* |
| *Why are NHS England retaining confirmatory PCR within their staff?* | *In line with clinical advice, confirmatory PCR testing will remain for NHS staff and in Adult Social Care, where the test is taken as part of an asymptomatic testing workplace programme and results may be reported using a self-reporting tool by the individual or by their workplace. It will also remain for those who work in primary schools where testing is done at home, but not for those who work in secondary schools who take tests at school. Utilising confirmatory PCR in settings that use a self-reporting tool will minimise the risk that incorrectly reported positive results are registered. Confirmatory PCR testing will also be used for vaccine and LFD testing surveillance, genome sequencing and for self-administered tests.*  *Confirmatory PCR will continue for:*   * *NHS England staff* * *Adult Social Care* * *Primary school workers* * *Hauliers* * *Scotland / N. Ireland / Wales* * *(Those in pilots using self-test reporting tools)* |
| *Why is this change only happening in England and not in devolved administrations despite having similar prevalence?* | *This change will take effect in England only as of 27 January 2021.*  *Health is a devolved matter, and it is for each of the four nations of the UK to decide on their own testing policy.* |
| *Won’t it mean people are less likely to come forward for LFD testing if a positive result places them under a legal duty?* | *It is essential that anyone who tests positive self-isolates immediately to protect their friends, family, colleagues and local community – and to help stop the spread of the virus and save lives.* |
| *As an employer, why should I participate in workplace testing if my staff don’t have the opportunity of a PCR test to confirm they have the virus?* | *With higher incidence of COVID-19 in the general population, expert public health advice is that there is limited value in a confirmatory PCR test. Regular staff testing, with self-isolation for those who test positive, helps to protect other staff from getting the virus and helps to reduce overall absences from work.* |
| *Why do cross channel hauliers still need to do confirmatory PCR?* | *Several countries have introduced COVID-19 testing requirements for hauliers. The rules are different in each country. Check the rules before you travel and take the necessary action.* |
| *Why do primary school workers need to take confirmatory PCR tests but not secondary school workers?* | *LFD testing for primary school workers is done at home while secondary school workers take tests at school. This distinction means primary school workers self-report their results and need confirmatory PCR but not secondary school workers. Taking a confirmatory test is policy for all self-report settings (not just primary schools).* |