

2020.04.21

5 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the Covid-19 testing equipment and kit that had been acquired for Jersey: (OQ.104/2020)

Given the U.K. Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has stated that no test is better than having an unreliable test, will the Minister confirm whether the testing equipment and kit acquired for Jersey has been checked and approved by the Centre for Applied Micro-Biology and Research at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down; and if not, why not?

Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The Centre for Applied Micro-Biology and Research now forms part of Public Health England and I am pleased to confirm that all of Jersey's diagnostic P.C.R. (polymerase chain reaction) testing for COVID-19 is either conducted by Public Health England or is undertaken using a platform which is recognised by Public Health England.

3.5.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Halogen company or test kit that we are using is part of, and I apologise to anyone who is Chinese, Zhejiang Orient Gene Biotechnic, can the Minister tell us how accurate that test is based on the results from Public Health England? Is it 10 per cent, 20 per cent, 50 per cent, 90 per cent, 95 per cent?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, those are the different tests. They are not the diagnostic tests that are currently in use. They are test kits that have come into the Island, which will test whether people have antibodies in their blood and thus indicating whether they been infected and recovered from COVID-19. So those tests are not in general use at the moment. They are being validated in the hospital lab. But in recent tests undertaken by the World Health Organization the kits we have purchased were the only tests that demonstrated 100 per cent specificity, meaning there was no cross-reactivity with other human coronavirus strains. If I could just add, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority has confirmed that the kits we purchased are safe to be placed on the U.K. market but to the best of our knowledge neither of the kits we have purchased have yet been evaluated by Public Health England. That concludes my answer.

3.5.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Could the Minister indicate whether stocks or orders prior to the outbreak of the epidemic were in stock in plentiful supply before the outbreak of this current epidemic?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not think they could have been because this is new to the whole world community. So these tests for a new virus have only been developed in recent months. As the Deputy will know, there is pressure worldwide to source these testing kits.

3.5.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The presence of P.P.E. (personal protective equipment), whether it is visors or other, was that in plentiful supply prior to the outbreak?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, that is moving away from testing but we did have stocks of P.P.E.; I refer to the written question that I have filed today. But of course the need for additional P.P.E. or personal protective equipment has become apparent and there are huge challenges at the moment in every country to source the P.P.E. that is needed. But in that respect I believe hard work put in by the teams in Jersey is putting us in a good position, so huge challenges remain.

3.5.4 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

As coming out of the lockdown depends on accurate antibody tests, when will the Minister be in a position to tell us how accurate our tests are so that we can evaluate the extent of the contagion within the Island?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I would like to assure the Deputy that a programme is being planned which will allow a sampling of what is presently considered a sample of 2,000 people from across the Island in order to give us a picture of how the infection may have spread across our community. This sample testing is being developed with Statistics Jersey by our public health team and Ministers have had an early briefing on it, lots of work to be done, but we hope in the next month, in just perhaps a few weeks, that we will be able to commence that sort of sample testing.