

20.11.17

23 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding P.C.R. testing times (OQ.333/2020):

Will the Minister advise the Assembly what impact, if any, the presence of the on-Island testing laboratory has had on the speed of polymerase chain reaction (P.C.R.) testing within the last month?

Answer:

Testing alongside tracing and isolation are our key operational lines of defence to ensure that new cases of COVID-19 are identified, and we can break the chain of coronavirus being passed on to other people.

Testing will help us prevent new clusters and outbreaks of the virus. We have built robust and effective capacity to successfully deliver testing, tracing and isolation, underpinned by monitoring and enforcement.

During the summer the development of an on-Island PCR testing laboratory has allowed testing capacity to steadily increase. Together with existing off-laboratory provision, we have the capability for large volumes of testing; at present we can quickly process up to 65,000 PCR tests per month on-island, and can access a similar capacity from laboratories in England if we need to.

Examples of how the on-island PCR testing capacity has impacted can be described as follows:

Turnaround Times:

- The average turnaround time on the 1st August was almost 29 hours. Our target average turnaround for the on-island lab is 12 hours, and I'm pleased to confirm that we are achieving this, with an average of just 9 hours over the past week.
- As the time taken to process a PCR swab has been shortened considerably for passengers arriving to the Island, we have been able to introduce a day 0 isolation period for passengers arriving from 'Green' countries and regions.
- Passengers arriving from 'amber' regions have also been able to resume their normal lives within 24 hours of their 'day 5' test; previously this was a longer isolation period whilst waiting for test results to be returned from the off-island laboratory.
- And our expanded workforce testing is also being processed on-island, which means we can identify direct contacts of positive cases in the workplace more quickly, isolate and test these individuals, and help manage COVID transmission from asymptomatic Islanders.

Workforce screening

This programme represents a key part of the pre-emptive measures set out in the Winter Strategy. Swabs from this programme are sent to the on-island lab.

- In the first two weeks of the workforce testing, 18 positive cases were identified. Their direct contacts have been traced, isolated and tested and Officers continue to consider whether precautionary wider testing is needed in the locations where a positive case and a number of direct contacts have been identified – for example, in a workplace or a school.
- Almost 1,900 PCR tests were undertaken in the 6 days at the harbour drive-through.
- In addition, a significant proportion of hospital staff and care home staff were tested at their places of work.

- Workforce testing uptake was spread across various groups, including teachers, retail staff, post and utilities.
- Testing at the harbour is by appointment only, between 11.30am and 7pm Monday – Friday and 0830 – 6pm on Saturday. If demand requires, we can also open on a Sunday.

Escalation

The various forms of lockdown in surrounding countries, and the end of the summer tourist season, has seen a significant reduction in passenger numbers to the island. Increased cases of infections in those countries has increased the relative risk associated with inbound travellers and led to the majority of the UK being designated as 'red' regions.

Ministers have recently agreed additional testing at the border. The additional PCR testing capacity required to deliver this measure can be serviced from the on-island laboratory, and testing takes place at the airport drive-through.

The appointment system for day 5 and the new day 10 tests is now automated.

- Based on current passenger numbers (approximately 100 arrivals per day) there will be an estimated additional 200 test per day (assuming the majority of those arrivals are from country's/regions assessed as high risk- red). All the additional PCR tests will be processed through the on-Island laboratory.
- This estimate does not include any additional testing related to contact tracing.
- This increased capacity, along with other additional testing for contact tracing, can be delivered within our existing testing capacity. We continue to keep this under review, to ensure we are able to respond to changing needs.