

Dear Colleague

Enhanced Surveillance of COVID-19 in Scotland – Serology programme – Continuation for 2021/22

I am writing to thank you for all the support you have provided to the Enhanced Surveillance of COVID-19 in Scotland – Serology Programme during 2020/21; and request that this important work continues for 2021/22.

The objective of this programme is to continue to monitor the levels of exposure to COVID-19 infection in the Scottish population. Serological surveillance remains critical to determining the overall extent of infection across the population and to informing the public health response.

The surveillance programme has been in operation since the first wave of the pandemic, with over 30,000 residual blood samples analysed, and the information is now readily accessible through a PHS data dashboard. This information significantly enhances the knowledge we have about the prevalence of the virus in communities across the country.

It is very important that this programme continues to monitor the prevalence of COVID-19 infection and patient characteristics and funding has been committed until 31 March 2022. The following sources of blood samples remain important for understanding the seroprevalence of COVID-19 across Scotland:

1. Primary care residual blood submitted to biochemistry for other investigations and captured at the point of discard.

We would be grateful if all Boards could continue with the collection of these bloods until 31 March 2022; and continue to send to SMiRL, Inverness for testing and subsequent analysis at Public Health Scotland.

2. Antenatal booking bloods submitted at 12 weeks for virological testing.

We would ask you to continue to send antenatal samples for testing at the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh until 31 March 2022.

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Gregor Smith

Date: 30 March 2021

SGHD/CMO(2021)8

For action

Chief Executives, NHS Boards
Medical Directors, NHS Boards
Directors of Public Health
Nurse Directors
Directors of Dentistry
Primary Care Leads, NHS Boards
Infectious Disease Consultants
Consultant Physicians
General Practitioners
Practice Nurses
CPHMs
Accident and Emergency
Departments
Occupational Health Departments
Virology Laboratories
Travel Clinics
Directors of Pharmacy
Scottish Ambulance Service
NHS 24
Public Health Scotland

Further Enquiries to:

Scottish Government
E: Rebekah.carton@gov.scot

Enhanced Surveillance Cell
E: phs.hpsc冠onavirus@nhs.net

3. Paediatric plasma or serum samples sent to blood sciences from A&E, OPD and other primary care settings.

We also would like to request that laboratories continue testing the paediatric blood samples that have been sent to blood sciences for analysis and captured at the point of discard. This will continue until 31 March 2022.

4. Samples originally collected from blood donors have been retrieved and tested by the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service (SNBTS)

We would be grateful if SNBTS could continue with the collection and testing of these bloods until 31 March 2022; and continue to send results to Public Health Scotland for analysis.

Supporting Evaluation of the Vaccination Programme

The rapid progress of the COVID-19 vaccination programme necessitates a broadening of the focus of the PHS serology surveillance programme to consider vaccine impact as well as population exposure.

The National COVID-19 Serology Strategy Group have agreed to endorse new protocols where data linkage via Community Health Index (CHI) will be used where appropriate to identify which serological samples have been vaccinated and which have not. This will allow the surveillance programme to adjust the seroprevalence estimates in respect of the vaccine and to support evaluation of vaccine impact studies.

Resourcing and finance

We are aware of the burden this request places on laboratories. To assist we can confirm that Ministers have agreed to continue to fund the costs associated with this work until 31 March 2022 on the basis that these costs are confirmed to be additional to existing funded services.

You should work with your finance teams to ensure that any additional costs are reflected within the financial plans submitted regularly to Scottish Government supporting your local mobilisation process. This may include extending current staff contracts or commitments to paying staff overtime as required.

Many thanks for your continued support in all aspects of enhanced surveillance. If you have any questions regarding this, please contact Rebekah Carton by email at Rebekah.carton@gov.scot and she will deal with your query.

Yours sincerely

Gregor Smith

Dr Gregor Smith
Chief Medical Officer