



Title: Test and Trace Paper

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CONFIDENTIAL

Test and Trace: Update

1.0 Executive Summary

All parts of the testing pathway are operating at close to maximum surge capacity (*referrals, swabbing, laboratory testing and contact tracing*). The Test and Trace system has limited scope to further increase capacity.

- PCR Testing capacity has grown to **225,000** per week from the original weekly 100,000 baseline capacity, reaching the final stage in the surge plan. We have further plans to grow this to 245,000 PCR tests per week by the end of this year.
- In the last six weeks there have been one million PCR tests undertaken.
- Community referrals have **decreased by 2.7%** in comparison to the same time-period last week while **community positivity is now at 18.7%**.
- Swabs completed in the community was **182,776**, this is a **2% increase** in comparison to the same time-period last week.
- The highest number of swabs over the past week was **30,054 swabs** (including test centre and outbreak referrals).
- The single highest day for testing referrals to date was on Monday, 29th November 2021 with over **38,705** referrals recorded in total, and **17,113** of these being self-referrals.
- Additional capacity has been put in place in recent weeks through utilisation of the Defence Forces, new community swabbing recruitment campaigns and engagement with private healthcare providers.
- The median end to end TAT for a not detected result in the Community is **1.2** days.
- The median end to end TAT for a detected result in the Community is **1.9** days
- In the past week **221,778** laboratory tests were completed, this is the highest volume of lab tests completed to date in a 7-day period.
- Serial testing continues in residential care facilities (149 cases identified in the current cycle) and food production facilities (100 cases identified in the current cycle).
- Residential Care Facility PCR staff serial testing has commenced from Monday, December 6th which will consume an additional c3,000 PCR tests per day.
- Over **139,957** antigen tests have been reported through the public antigen results portal.
- The provision of antigen tests for asymptomatic children and staff in Primary schools, who are identified as members of a pod with a confirmed Covid-19 case, commenced on Monday 29th November. Over **28,486** antigen test kits have been dispatched to date
- Given increasing demand and possible further impact of the new variant, a contingency plan is being drafted to consider using antigen testing for symptomatic users, in line with WHO and ECDC guidance. Introduction of such a measure would require further guidance from NPHET.
- A Variant of Concern (VoC) surveillance process has been operational since the first new variant was identified. This existing process is now being utilised for Omicron screening.
- A VoC working group has been re-established which is actively enhancing and monitoring the Testing Pathways as guidance emerges.
- If travel restrictions due to Omicron are implemented for a large number of countries, it will place additional pressure on our testing and tracing system that is already operating at close to maximum capacity.

2.0 Service Status / Capacity Levels

The Test and Trace system is now operating at surge and is under severe pressure. Further demands on the testing system in recent weeks, due to clinical referrals and close contacts, has led to delays in accessing the testing services in some parts of the country.

There are now 41 testing centres in operation nationally - 35 community swabbing centres and an additional 6 community swabbing centres operated by a private operator under HSE NAS governance in Dublin, Cork, Athlone and Limerick. Additional capacity has been put in place in recent weeks through the Defence Forces, new community swabbing recruitment campaigns and engagement with private healthcare providers.

A total of **95.2%** of the clinical priority referrals are getting appointments within same day/next day. Self-referral test appointments are being made available throughout the day to mitigate this demand pressure. National Standing Capacity for swabbing has increased from 21,500 to 36,400 in the period up to the 6th December. This includes community swabbing, serial testing, home and mobile, private providers and acute hospital swabbing.

Standing capacity for laboratory testing is 32,400 tests (27,400 community and 5,000 acute hospitals). A surge plan is in place to increase to 36,000 (31,000 Community Tests and including 5,000 acute). Laboratories are continuing results within the key performance indicators for the programme.

Standing capacity within Contact Tracing has increased from 4,045 to an average of 5,595* capacity over 7 days, following the automation of Call 3 (call to close contacts). Based on the current headcount, Contact Tracing is now approaching maximum capacity, with very limited surge capacity remaining. Additional efficiencies and mechanisms have been introduced to support the contact tracing process, including technology to enable individuals to identify close contacts and book follow on tests.

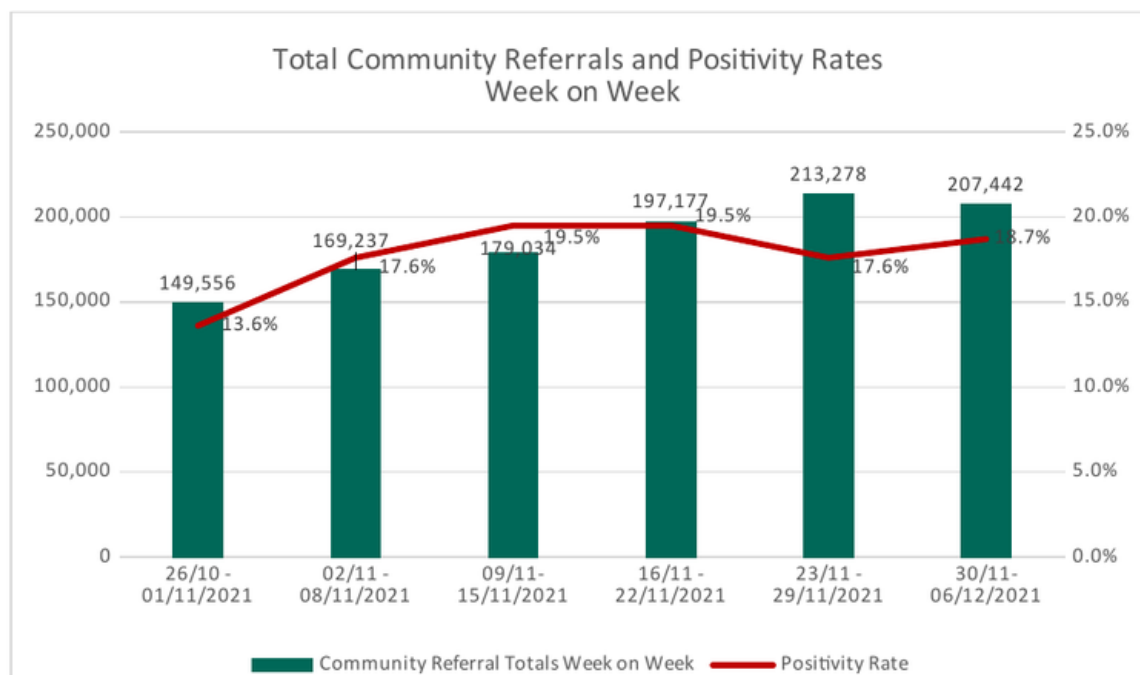
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We are continuously and actively monitoring the demand status, considering the evolving needs and potential service demands in the context of increasing virus transmission within the community.

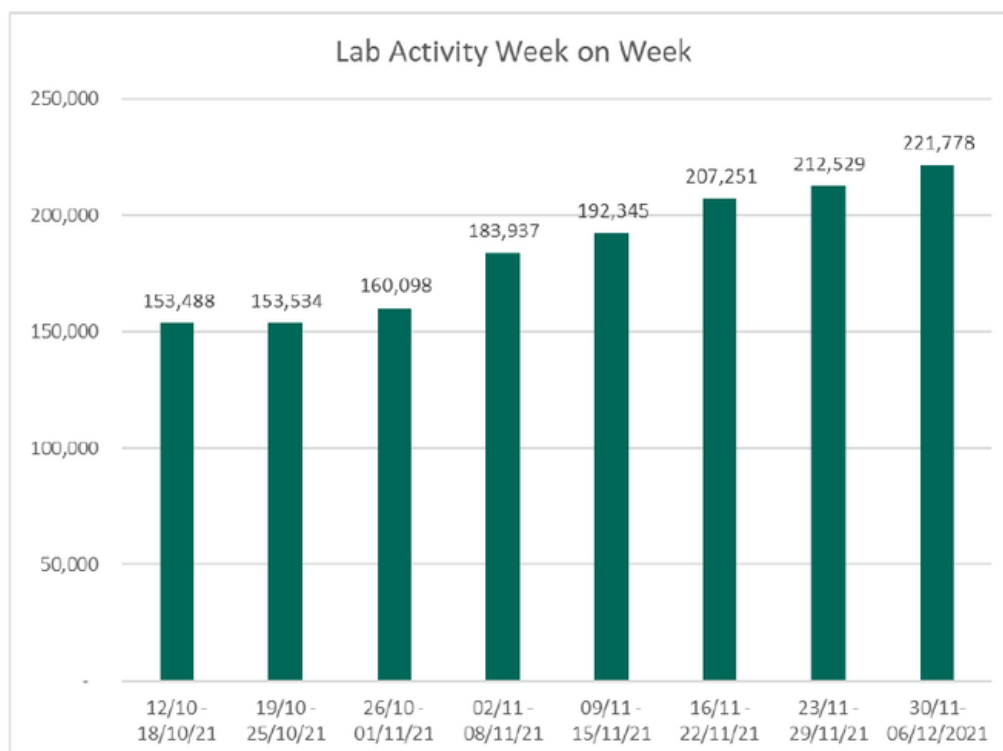
3.0 Current Trends

3.1 Referrals and Swabbing

- From the 30th November – 06th December, there were **c.207,442 community referrals**. Overall, total community referrals have **decreased by 2.7%** in comparison to the same time-period last week while Community positivity is at **c.18.7%**.



- From 30th November – 06th December, there were:
 - 33 international travel portal referrals (↓71% compared to last week)
 - 109,151 self-referrals (↑ 0.8% compared to last week)
 - 36,817 GP referrals (↓ 14% compared to last week)
- Over the last 7 days, the number of **swabs completed in the community** was **182,776** this is a **2% increase** in comparison to the same time-period last week. The highest community swabbing day over the past week reached **c.30,054 swabs**. This translates into delays in getting an appointment for self-referrals in most areas excluding the west of the country.
- Approximately **95.2%** of GP and Close Contact Referrals received an appointment on the same day or on the next day.
- From the 30th November – 06th December, there have been approximately **221,778 lab tests** reported in community, private and acute labs.



- In the community, over the last 7 days (30th November – 06th December), the median end-to-end turnaround time from referral to:
 - SMS for **not detected** tests was **1.2 day**
 - Communication of a **detected result by call** was **2.0 days**
 - Contact tracing completed, for **detected results** was **1.9 days**
- Of those tested with close contacts during the same 7-day period, the average number of close contacts was **3.1**.
- From the 30th November – 06th December, there were:
 - 30,051 call 1s (↓5% compared to last week)
 - 29,386 call 2s (↓5% compared to last week)
 - 3,879 call 3s (↓3% compared to last week)
- Recruitment of staff to support swabbing and contact tracing is ongoing. As of the 29th November 2021, **791 contact tracing** staff have been hired and placed.

3.2 Serial Testing Programmes

Nursing Homes:

Serial testing of staff in RCFs commenced on 20th June 2020. Cycle 18 commenced on 8th November. To date, the cycle has completed **9,597 swabs** and identified **149 detected** cases. This results in a **1.55% detection** rate.

Mental Health Facilities

Serial Testing of Staff in commenced on 21st of January 2021. Cycle 11 commenced on the 11th of October. To date, **378 swabs** have been completed in **3 facilities**, identifying **11 detected cases**. This results in a **2.91% detection rate**.

Food Production Facilities

Serial Testing of Staff in Food Production Facilities commenced on 21st of August 2020. **Cycle 16** commenced on 15th of November. To date, **4,923 swabs** have been completed in **54 facilities**, identifying **100 detected cases**. This results in a **2.03% detection rate**.

4.0 Future Scenarios/Demand Modelling

The Test and Trace Programme are working with IEAMG to model the scenarios with particular emphasis on swabbing demand. The IEMAG case incidence scenarios used for the current iteration have now been updated to reflect the 19th November IEMAG model. They do not include any hypothesised impact of the Omicron variant. Further new IEMAG scenarios are expected in the next number of days which may include allowance for Omicron.

Recent experience and short term projections show continuing high case prevalence driving demand for all components of the end to model. Community swabbing in particular continues to experience very high demand volumes and is currently in surge mode (25.5k swabs per day versus a baseline of 15k swabs per day). Whilst high volumes impact other parts of the process including contact tracing, the nature of these functions permits higher levels of flexibility and therefore increased ability to absorb pressure on the service. The pressure experienced by downstream components of the end to operating model is of course impacted by the ability of community swabbing to absorb high demand. Both optimistic and pessimistic IEMAG scenarios will drive short term demand that exceeds system capacity.

The next iteration of these model outputs is due on 16th December 2021.

5.0 Service Improvements

Antigen testing of close contacts who are fully vaccinated and have no symptoms is ongoing since 28th October. The numbers of close contacts referred through this pathway remains steady with an average of 3,587 per day for the last 7 days. A total of 123,639 test kits have been sent out since the programme commenced. 40,845 test results have been reported by close contacts and 14,478 positive antigen, with 7,969 cases confirmed on PCR testing.

The provision of antigen tests for asymptomatic children and staff in Primary schools, who are identified as members of a pod with a confirmed Covid-19 case, commenced on Monday 29th November. This project was implemented using a call centre and distributor. Over 28,486 antigen test kits have been dispatched to date. A similar pathway for the early childhood learning and care sector is under development as is expected to be implemented next week.

Antigen screening continues for the Food Processing sector, as well as testing in some Acute Hospital settings. Antigen results may be collected by the sector (DAFM, Acute hospitals), or are reported via the online system for those carrying out self-tests. The HSE have also supplied antigen tests to other high-risk groups under the direction of Public Health leads, and will be providing antigen testing support to vulnerable and hard to reach groups through Social inclusion partners. Given increasing demand and possible further impact of the new variant a contingency plan is being drafted to consider using antigen testing for symptomatic users, in line with WHO and ECDC guidance. Introduction of such a measure would require further guidance from NPHE.

A pathway for self-swabbing for PCR testing is under review – further work is being carried out this week to identify swabbing sites or other locations that would be suitable facilitate his development. An increase in laboratory testing capacity is also being progressed to match the increase in testing self-swabbing would lead to.

End.