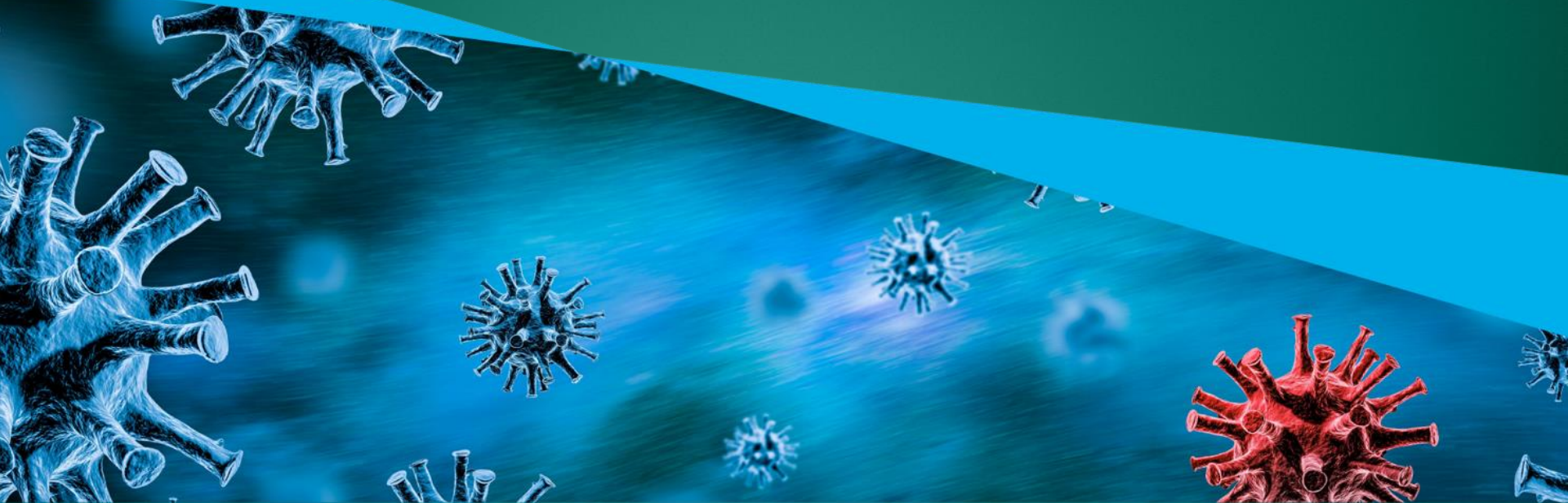




COVID-19 Clinical diagnostic assessment

Operational Guidance for General Practitioners

November 2023





Version control



Version	Date	Changes from previous version	Updated by
1.0	23 rd November 2022	Initial, approved and circulated GP operational guide	
2.0	3 rd November 2023	Updated to reflect change in PCR laboratory testing strategy	



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Introduction



The Public Health approach to the management of COVID-19 has moved from extensive case finding and tracing of infection, to reduce transmission, towards a response focused on mitigation of the severe impacts of COVID-19. This focusses on those most vulnerable to the disease, and those with risk factors who may benefit from specific interventions.

This purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive guide on the operational requirements to support General Practitioners in the assessment and diagnosis of patients within the relevant risk groups. It is to assist GPs in day-to-day activities related to COVID-19 and outline relevant contact points in the event of queries on the process.

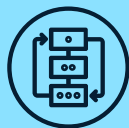
In line with established practices, and for the relevant patients only, the GP can assess and consult on the prescribing of Paxlovid. Either a PCR or Antigen (including self-administered) test can be used in making that clinical decision.

Treatment for COVID-19 is currently recommended for people who are at the highest risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19.





High-level activities



The necessary operational changes have been made to support GPs in the diagnosis and future management of an individual patient in relation to COVID-19. Below is a high-level summary of the process.



PCR and Antigen test kits are supplied to GP practices via the existing PPE ordering process <https://hseppe.powerappsportals.com/signin>



PCR samples are logged via an adapted version of the Healthlink referral form

If the PCR test is **not** recorded in Healthlink, there will be a **delay in the results** being reported as they may be issued via paper rather than via Healthlink/SMS



Samples for PCR testing may be obtained in-surgery, on a house-call or in a residential care facility (RCF)



PCR samples are to be transported to the local hospital laboratory for testing using existing methods of sample transportation



Results will be returned via Healthlink and to the patient via SMS

Results may be issued via paper if the test has not been recorded on Healthlink



The sample turnaround time will generally be within 24-48 hours (and may be over 72 hours for weekend testing)

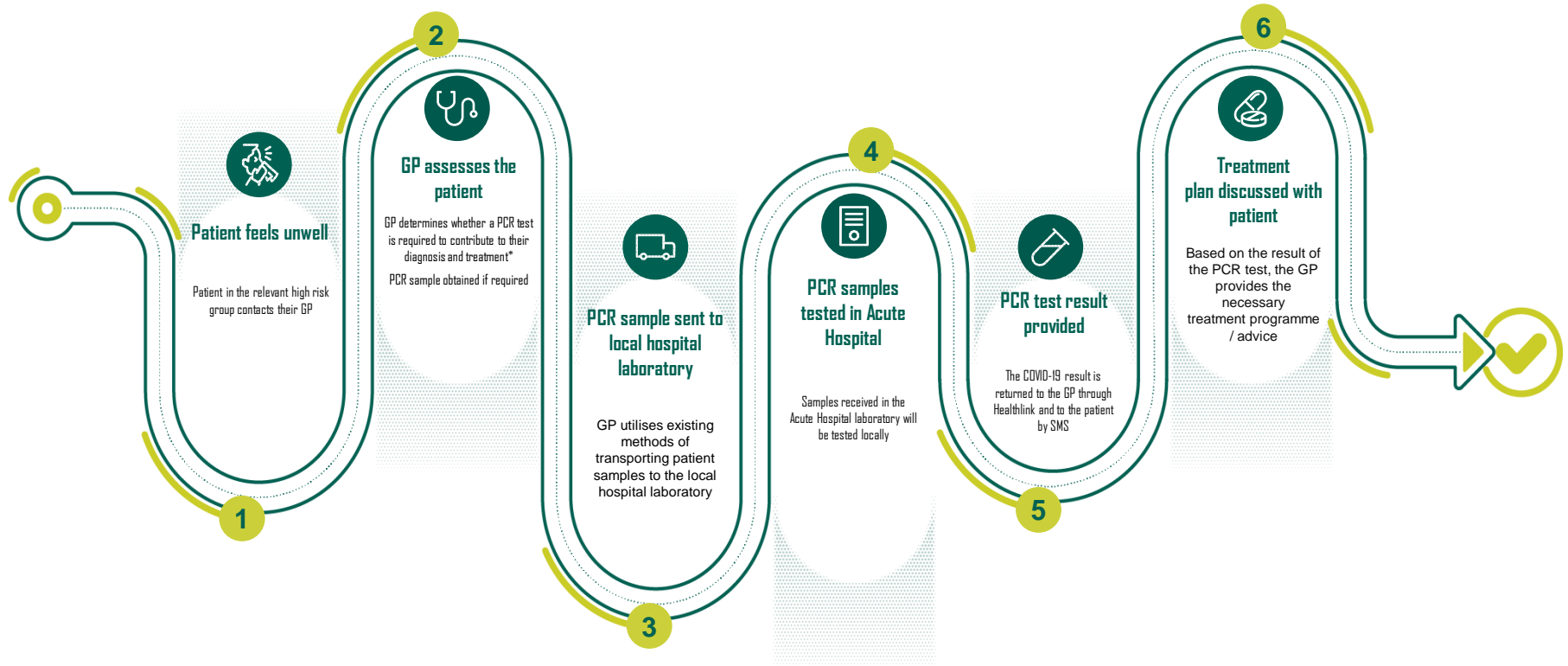
- This turnaround time may influence the chosen testing modality



A dedicated GP support team is available to deal with any service queries
Tel: 1800 807113



Patient treatment pathway for PCR testing



*Depending on the circumstances, and based on their clinical judgement, the GP may decide to use a Rapid antigen test



PCR kit ordering process



PCR and Antigen test kits are ordered via the DMS system, as per the existing PPE ordering process, and will be distributed weekly.

Deliveries will be made once per week in line with the existing PPE distribution schedule.

Urgent deliveries can be facilitated if requested.

GPs can order the required quantity of PCR & RADT kits weekly, via the DMS system (located [here](#)), as per the current PPE ordering process*. The SKUs for PCR and Antigen kits are:

- 9.6 Rapid Antigen Diagnostic Tests – 5 pack
- 9.7 Covid Specimen Testing Kit – 5 pack

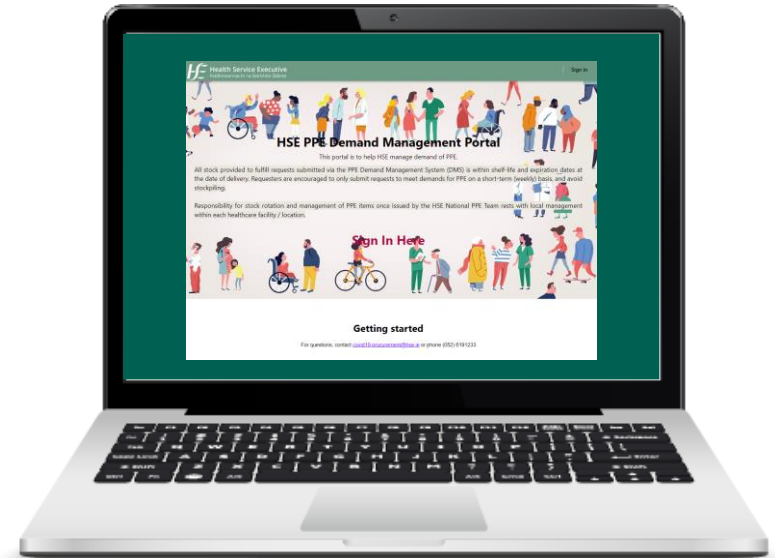
* Please note that, by default, the order for these products are marked as SUSPENDED.

On entering the quantity to be requested, the order for these products is changed to FULL ORDER. The order quantity is to be manually entered into the 'Total Actual PPE for Distribution' field from the edit option.

Sample images for PCR kits can be found [here](#) and RADT kits can be found [here](#).

Stock management

Stock should be managed on a 'first in, first out' (FIFO) basis meaning that PCR and RADT kits which were received in-practice first should be used first.





PCR testing for patients in General Practice



The option to refer to a Community Test Centre has been removed from Healthlink, and the referral page updated to include an option whereby a GP can confirm a PCR sample has been taken.

The former referral process via Healthlink has been adapted to allow GPs to record PCR tests.

Healthlink will now require a “PCR Test Type” to be selected once the GP has determined that a PCR test is required.

The GP will create a Covid-19 referral on Healthlink, as per the current process, and select “**Swab Completed**” for samples obtained in-surgery.

The details are sent to the testing laboratory via Swiftqueue to ensure all data pathways are retained, including notification of results.

Best practice would recommend that the test is not entered into Healthlink until the sample has actually been taken.

Please note: 'Patient's GP' details are required when you, the referrer, are not the patient's GP. Follow-up reports will be returned to the selected GP. Otherwise, results will be returned to you.

Patient's GP:

GP Telephone:* (preferably mobile)

Referral Category:*

- General Covid-19 Test
- Healthcare Worker
- Close Contact of Confirmed Case
- At Risk Group
- GP / Practice Staff
- Patient is awaiting admission to a RCF

Covid-19 Symptomatic:* Yes No

Date of Last Test: (where applicable)

PCR Test Type:*

- Swab completed

Additional Details:

- Hearing Loss
- Can Read Sign Language
- Visually Impaired

Additional Notes for Testers:

Section for completion by Irish Sentinel GP Network Only



PCR / Antigen testing for patients in Residential Care Facilities (RCF)



Testing within a Residential Care Facility (RCF) may be completed by the GP or by appropriately competent Nursing home staff (as per current practice for bloods or other samples).
The GP may choose to supervise or administer a Rapid Antigen test as required

PCR test

If the GP has determined that a PCR test is required, s/he is responsible to log the test in Healthlink.

The GP will create a Covid-19 referral on Healthlink, as per the current process, and select “**Swab Completed**” for samples obtained in an RCF.

The responsibility for ensuring the sample reaches the swab logistics network lies with the individual taking the swab (e.g., If an RCF staff member takes the sample, they must ensure it is transported to the local hospital laboratory).

Antigen Test

If Rapid Antigen testing is being performed, there is no requirement to notify Public Health for isolated cases.

The RCF should notify their local Public Health lead where there are multiple positive cases / potential outbreak, as per normal processes.

Please note: "Patient's GP" details are required when you, the referrer, are not the patient's GP. Follow-up reports will be returned to the selected GP. Otherwise, results will be returned to you.

Patient's GP:

GP Telephone:*
(preferably mobile)

Referral Category:*
 General Covid-19 Test
 Healthcare Worker
 Close Contact of Confirmed Case
 At Risk Group
 GP / Practice Staff
 Patient is awaiting admission to a RCF

Covid-19 Symptomatic:* Yes No

Date of Last Test: (where applicable)

PCR Test Type:*
 Swab completed

Additional Details:
 Hearing Loss
 Can Read Sign Language
 Visually Impaired

Additional Notes for Testers:

Section for completion by Irish Sentinel GP Network Only



PCR sample transport



PCR samples should be transported to your local hospital laboratory, using existing methods of transporting patient samples.

All packaging components will be provided to the GP.

Once the PCR sample has been obtained, the swab should be packed as below. If packed incorrectly the sample may be rejected at laboratory.

- Ensure the swab is inserted into the vial and lid is secured
- Patient details must be entered onto the vial (3 patient identifiers required)
- Laboratory request form completed with the patient and practice details
- Vial and form inserted into polybag

GPs will utilise their existing methods of transporting patient samples to the local hospital laboratory to transport the PCR samples.

Please note, from the 13th November 2023, PCR samples will no longer be further transported to the NVRL for testing, the samples will be tested within the local hospital laboratory.



Out of hours and weekend testing



PCR Samples obtained out of hours and at weekends should be sent to the local hospital laboratory on the next working day. Due to logistical reasons, at weekends and out of hours, it may be more appropriate to administer an Antigen test to obtain an immediate sample result.

As sample testing is available Monday to Friday, it is possible for GPs to supervise or administer a Rapid Antigen test, as required, outside of normal practice hours.

If there is a need to obtain a PCR sample from a patient outside of usual practice hours, this sample should be held by the GP until the next working day and transported to the local laboratory.

As mentioned previously, best practice would recommend the referral for the test in Healthlink is not made until the sample has actually been taken.





Result reporting



PCR test results will be returned to the GP via Healthlink as per the current pathway, and to the patient via SMS.

The result of a PCR test will be returned to the GP through Healthlink, as per the current pathway, and to the individual by SMS.

- The result turnaround time (TAT) is generally expected to be within 24-48 hours after the sample is sent to the local hospital laboratory
- Increased end-to-end TAT from the sample being taken to the result being communicated will arise for any samples taken over the weekend, which could be in excess of 72 - 96 hours
- Anticipated delays in TAT may impact the choice of testing modality





A dedicated HSE GP Liaison team is in place to support GPs with any questions or issues in relation to this service. The team can be contacted on **1800 807113** during business hours (9am – 5pm, Monday - Friday)

A dedicated GP Liaison (GPL) team are available to support GPs with queries relating to this pathway.

The team are a central point of contact for all queries. If the query / issue cannot be resolved immediately, the GPL agent will liaise with the relevant team within the HSE Test & Trace programme.

The expected resolution time is 1 business day but is dependent on the complexity of the query.

When contacting the GPL team, please have as much information as possible related to the query to expedite resolution. Examples of required information are listed on this slide, but this is not an exhaustive list.

For the following example queries, please have the applicable information to hand at a minimum:

PCR Test Kit queries

(e.g., damaged / missing components)

- Batch/Lot number of faulty PCR kits
- Number of test kits impacted
- Date of initial order and delivery of PCR kits

PCR test results queries

(e.g., delayed result / failure to return a result)

- Date/Time sample was taken and transported to local laboratory
- Name of local hospital laboratory to which the sample was sent
- Patient details





Appendix

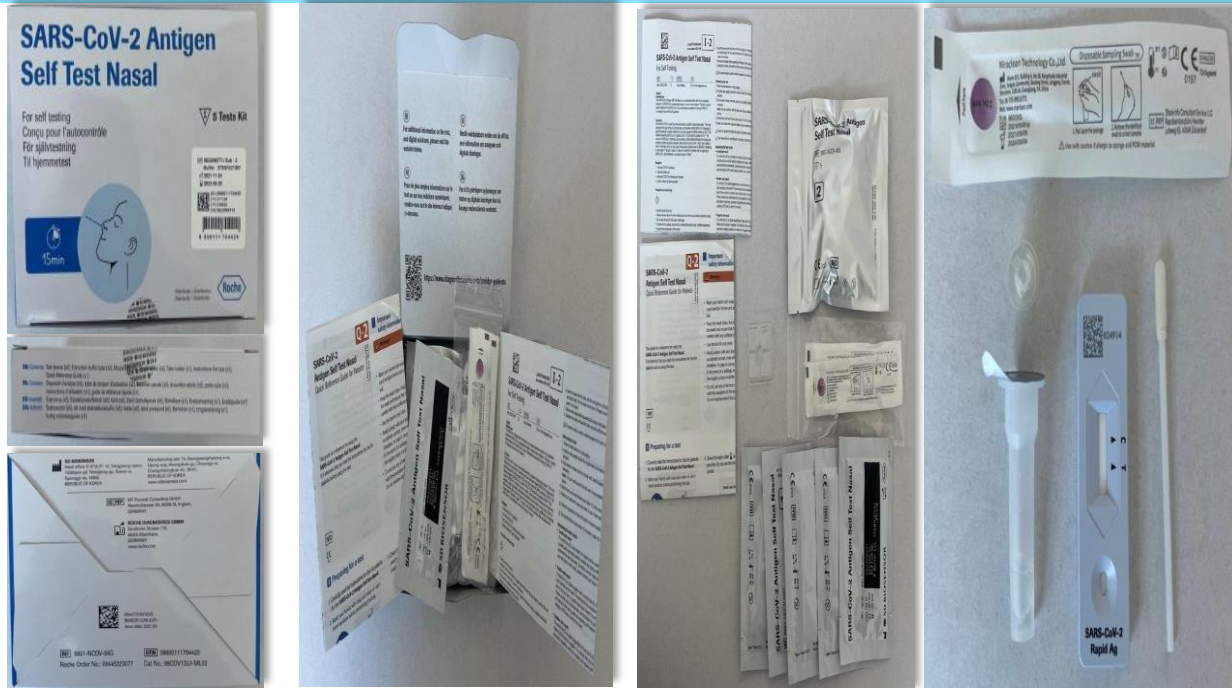




Sample Antigen kits



Below are examples of the Rapid Antigen Detection Test (RADT) kits to be supplied





Sample PCR kits



Below are examples of the PCR kits to be supplied



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