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Date: 14 November 2023

Reference: NCO-44-23

### **Changes to laboratory testing strategy relating to COVID-19 samples**

Dear Doctor,

I refer to [Circular NCO-19-2022](#), dated 1 Dec 2022, which detailed the operational guidance on the process for ordering PCR and Rapid Antigen test kits, and on the packaging, transport and recording of PCR tests.

#### **Updated Operational Guidance**

From Monday, 13 November 2023, COVID-19 PCR test samples taken within General Practice for the purposes of clinical assessment and diagnosis will no longer be transported from the local hospital to the NVRL for testing. The COVID-19 samples from patients will be tested directly in the local hospital laboratory. The aim is to mainstream COVID-19 and to improve turnaround time (TAT) of swab to result, as there will be no requirement for further transport to the NVRL. This will expedite the clinical diagnosis and any prescribing of Paxlovid, which is time sensitive.

The Operational Guidance for GPs which provides an operational overview on the COVID-19 clinical diagnostic pathway and the contact point for support should there be any further questions is available at [Operational Guidance](#)

Please note:

- GPs will no longer be required to send the sample in the rigid yellow container. Samples should be sent in a regular biohazard bag only.
- Samples collected by Sentinel GPs for surveillance purposes are not affected, continue to send these samples to the NVRL directly through the established process.

Review period:

- The service will be formally reviewed after 3 months, and is subject to ongoing monitoring and service user feedback.

We would once again like to thank you for your continued support and contribution in the management of COVID-19.

Yours sincerely,

**Geraldine Crowley**  
Assistant National Director  
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