



Date: 27 March 2023

Circular Number: NCO-12-2023

COVID-19 Testing – Update on Public Health Guidance

Dear Doctor,

I refer to letter NCO-19-2022 dated December 1, 2022 (Ongoing GP Supports in relation to Novel Therapeutic Agents – Paxlovid) indicating the expected closure of the COVID-19 testing centres and the PCR online self-referral facility.

The Chief Medical Officer has now issued updated Public Health advice in line with the implementation of the Government’s Strategic Approach for the Management of COVID-19. Testing for COVID-19 will no longer be necessary for the vast majority of the population. The advice for most people, if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or other viral respiratory tract infections, is that they should stay at home and limit contact with others until 48 hours after their symptoms have substantially or fully resolved – they do not need to do a COVID-19 test.

In line with this new advice, community testing centres across the country and the self-referral portal for booking PCR tests will no longer be required, and both will close on 30th March. Home testing by the National Ambulance Service will also cease.

From 30th March 2023, health and care workers who are household close contacts are no longer required to do antigen tests. Therefore, the current antigen-ordering portal on HSE.ie will also close. Specific guidance will be issued to health and care workers.

Both PCR and antigen testing will continue to be used by doctors in hospitals, and in General Practice settings for the purpose of diagnosing and deciding on the provision of treatment for COVID-19 for patients in specific high risk groups.

As outlined in Circular NCO-18-2022, dated 25th November 2022, General Practice continues to play a valuable clinical role in assessing the suitability of patients who are in one of the relevant risk groups for prescribing of a course of Paxlovid anti-viral medication, in the context of treating COVID-19 infection. Either a PCR or Antigen (including self-administered) test may be used in making that clinical decision. Further detail regarding the



Office of National Director
Clinical Programme Implementation &
Professional Development
HSE, Dr Steevens Hospital, Dublin 8. D08 W2A8
Tel: 01-6352308
Email: community.strategy@hse.ie

process for ordering PCR and Rapid Antigen test kits, and on the packaging, transport and recording of PCR tests is outlined in the Circular NCO-19-2022 dated 1st December 2022.

Treatment for COVID-19 is currently recommended for people who are at the highest risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. Full guidance can be found in the HSE Interim Guidance for the Pharmacological Management of Patients with COVID-19, at the following link:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/drugs-management-programme/hse-interim-guidance-for-the-pharmacological-management-of-patients-hospitalised-with-covid-19.pdf>

I would like once again to express my sincere gratitude to General Practitioners and their teams for their contribution to date in the management of COVID-19.

Please be assured of the HSE's continued support at this time.

Yours sincerely,

Pat Healy
National Director
Clinical Programme Implementation
& Professional Development