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**Briefing for all clients of Cordell Health Ltd on coronavirus (COVID-19)**

**as at 6 December 2020**

**UPDATE ON PROTECTING HEALTH AND INFORMING RISK ASSESSMENT**

1. Vaccination and risk management.

The national COVID-19 vaccination programme[[1]](#footnote-2) started last week and is of course excellent news. Priorities have been determined, based on vulnerability, set out in detail within the national guidance on vaccination; the “Green Book” and the provisional guidance pending further MHRA approvals of vaccines in its new Chapter 14a[[2]](#footnote-3).

As set out in the Government guidance[[3]](#footnote-4), no vaccine is completely effective, so those who have been vaccinated should continue to take the recommended precautions to avoid infection. We do not yet know whether vaccination will stop transmission of the virus, and so risk management controls need to stay in place in workplaces, including for those who have been vaccinated, until levels of infection in the community fall substantially.

2. Return to campus.

The Government have today provided further guidance on return to campus for students in the coming term[[4]](#footnote-5). The availability of rapid antigen tests as deployed to universities will contribute to the reduction in risk of outbreaks. It is however maintaining the hierarchy of risk management controls that is the central pillar of reducing infection rates, together with timely identification through testing and isolation of cases of COVID-19.

It is the risk to the local community where students live that is a particular concern for public health, which is why one reason engagement with the local authority Director of Public Health (DPH) is so important. The DPH and the local health protection team will also provide guidance on cases on campus, as well as deployment of rapid antigen tests.

3. Testing.

Testing in universities will be undertaken using lateral flow devices (LFDs), as used for in Liverpool, Merthyr Tydfil, and increasingly in those areas under Tier 3 restrictions[[5]](#footnote-6).

In contrast to PCR, LAMP and LamPORE tests (further detailed in the guidance note on testing on our website[[6]](#footnote-7)), rapid antigen tests identify the presence of viral protein, rather than the genetic material (RNA). Although specificity remains high (if the test is positive it is highly likely you have COVID-19), sensitivity is lower than the tests that identify the presence of viral genetic material. False negatives (where the test does not pick that the person is infected) are therefore more likely with the rapid antigen tests than PCR.

Further to the earlier study published by PHE Porton Down and Oxford University[[7]](#footnote-8), which stated that the sensitivity may be as low as 50% depending on who administers the test, the Government have published the results of community testing in Liverpool[[8]](#footnote-9). Sensitivity was again about 50%, although rising to about 70% of cases with higher viral loads.

The main value of LFDs is in case finding in areas of high prevalence[[9]](#footnote-10). The aim of using in LFDs from 3 to 9 Dec was to provide some reassurance on safety in returning to their families for Christmas in 2020. The reason repeated testing is advised, in this example students being tested twice before going home, is that this improves overall sensitivity[[10]](#footnote-11).

Although sensitivity of a single LFD device is probably only 50% in this setting, this does have a value in identifying 50% of people infected who do not have symptoms and would otherwise have been missed. However, in places where the consequences of COVID-19 infection may be especially high, such as in care homes, caution over use of LFDs, for example as is envisaged to test relatives to allow visits to residents[[11]](#footnote-12), would be advised.

The Government has published guidance for employers on testing (updated 2 Dec 2020)[[12]](#footnote-13), and have also published a new NHS Test and Trace business plan as at 10 Dec 2020[[13]](#footnote-14).

4. Testing and contacts of cases - those who have symptoms (or a positive test).

The self-isolation period for contacts of cases has now been reduced to 10 days[[14]](#footnote-15).

Testing of contacts of those with symptoms is not recommended. Such primary contacts (in households, or if within 2m at work), should self isolate for 10 days since the person with symptoms developed these, or that person they are a contact of had a positive test. If they themselves develop symptoms, they should isolate for 10 days from that point.

We would emphasise the importance of employers reporting cases among their workforce, and engagement with their local health protection team, who will then advise on contact tracing[[15]](#footnote-16). For most workplaces, cases among employees will be more likely to have being acquired in the community rather than in work, but employers will wish to review their risk management controls to ensure the workplace remains “COVID secure”[[16]](#footnote-17).

5. Vulnerability, work and tiers in England.

If the workplace remains COVID secure, then even in those areas that have been placed in the highest tiers of restriction, in principle those employees who cannot work from home should be able to do so safely. This is of course provided all employees and others visiting the workplace adhere to the risk management controls and hygiene measures in place.

Over this last nine months we have been undertaking individual health risk assessments for many employees, in a wide range of sectors, including in schools, healthcare and social care. On our reports we advise that if the situation changes, which would include the local community being placed in a higher level tier of restriction, then your workplace risk assessment should be reviewed to ensure controls are appropriate and being adhered to.

In principle those at higher levels of vulnerability can still be employed in the way you have adjusted this at any tier. The Government have provided guidance on those considered clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), essentially those on the “shielding list”[[17]](#footnote-18). Those considered CEV are advised that at all tiers they should work from home if possible, but those who cannot work from home can be in the workplace in Tier 1 and Tier 2. We would recommend a review of the risk assessment by the employer with employees said to be CEV who is living and/or working in Tier 3, and to consider if adjustments might be appropriate[[18]](#footnote-19). We should be happy to advise as needed on any such cases on referral.

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1. COVID-19 vaccination programme at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-vaccination-programme> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Chapter 14a - COVID-19 - SARS-CoV-2 of the Green Book Dec 2020 (provisional guidance subject to MHRA approval of each vaccine) at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943663/Greenbook_chapter_14a_v3.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. What to expect after your COVID-19 vaccination at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-what-to-expect-after-vaccination/what-to-expect-after-your-covid-19-vaccination> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Students returning to higher education in the Spring term at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/students-returning-to-higher-education-from-spring-term> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. COVID-19 winter plan at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/937529/COVID-19_Winter_Plan.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. COVID-19 resources at: <https://cordellhealth.co.uk/covid-19-support-bundle/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. PHE Porton Down and Oxford University report on the efficacy of Innova lateral flow devices at: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-11-11-oxford-university-and-phe-confirm-lateral-flow-tests-show-high-specificity-and-are> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Community testing: a guide for local delivery 30 Nov 2020 at:   <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-testing-explainer/community-testing-a-guide-for-local-delivery#what-the-community-testing-programme-is> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. WHO interim guidance on Antigen-detection in the diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection using rapid immunoassays dated 11 Sep 2020 at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/antigen-detection-in-the-diagnosis-of-sars-cov-2infection-using-rapid-immunoassays> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. SAGE multidisciplinary task and finish group on mass testing at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/914931/s0712-tfms-consensus-statement-sage.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Testing for visitors to care homes using LFDs at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-lateral-flow-testing-of-visitors-in-care-homes/care-home-lfd-testing-of-visitors-guidance> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Guidance for employers on testing at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-guidance-for-employers/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-guidance-for-employers-and-third-party-healthcare-providers> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. NHS Test and Trace plan at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-test-and-trace-business-plan> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Guidance for those living in a household with a person who has suspected or confirmed COVID-19 at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#if-you-live-in-the-same-household-as-someone-with-covid-19> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Government direction on early COVID-19 outbreak management at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reporting-outbreaks-of-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-early-outbreak-management> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. HSE guidance on making your workplace COVID-secure during the coronavirus pandemic at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Government definition of those who are clinically extremely vulnerable at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#cev> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Government guidance on protecting the clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)