

27 July 2020

Dear Colleagues

**ANTIBODY TESTING NOW OPEN to STAFF WORKING IN CARE SECTOR –
Domiciliary Care Providers across Morecambe Bay**

You will be aware that everyone who has had symptoms of coronavirus/COVID-19, (a high temp, new or persistent cough, or loss or change to your sense of smell or taste) can be tested to see if they have the virus.

However, we now know that some individuals will have had the virus, but have not had the symptoms, and therefore did not get a test to confirm it. To help identify those who may have had the virus without symptoms, an antibody testing programme for staff working across Health and Social Care is now underway. This will potentially help us to better understand the behaviour of the virus.

Morecambe Bay, via the local hospitals' swabbing service, is now offering an antibody blood test for NHS staff and Domiciliary Care workers. The "antibody test" is a blood test that will indicate if a person has had COVID-19 in the past. When the body becomes infected, it produces antibodies to fight the infection - if antibodies are present in the blood, it indicates that an individual has had COVID-19.

Staff in domiciliary care across Morecambe Bay, including North Lancashire, South Lakes and Furness are able to register for the test at the link below. Staff will be asked to consent to the test for research and state which hospital site they prefer to attend for the test, (Furness General Hospital, Barrow or Royal Lancaster Infirmary, Lancaster). The test is entirely voluntary and staff will be expected to make their own way to the clinical appointment at the allotted time.

You may need to wait up to a week to be invited for the blood test and then up to 2 weeks before you receive your result. Results will be sent either to your email address or your phone contact that you provided at the time of registration. The results of the blood test will be shared with your GP however; they do not need to be shared with managers in your organisation.

Please note, the outcome of this test does not change what you should do in terms of social distancing, using PPE or social contacts as described in national guidance and local protocols.

Antibody testing is available: Monday – Friday in core working hours at FGH and RLI, time slots will be confirmed at the time of registration.

Please use the link below to book your antibody test and see frequently asked questions overleaf. Please note that you will need your NHS number to access the service and the form asks "*is this booking for a research trial*", please select no as this is a local trial.

<https://fx.uhmb.nhs.uk/AntibodyRequest/covid19>

Further information about the national antibody testing programme can be found here:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/antibody-test-to-check-if-youve-had-coronavirus/>

Thanks for your participation

Kind Regards



**Margaret Williams
Chief Nurse
Morecambe Bay CCG**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is an antibody test?

COVID-19 antibody testing (also known as SARS CoV-2 antibody test) is a blood test to look at whether the body has produced an immune reaction (antibodies) to the COVID-19 virus.

Antibodies develop in viral infections as part of the body's attempt to fight the virus. An antibody test can tell someone whether they have had the virus, which causes COVID-19, in the past. The test works by taking a blood sample and testing for the presence of antibodies to the COVID-19 virus.

What are the different types of tests used in the NHS?

There are two types of test available for COVID-19; the PCR/viral test, and the antibody test.

PCR test/virus test (also known as the swab test):

PCR test aims to find out if you currently have the virus by taking a swab from the nose and throat. It does not confirm if an individual has had the virus. A positive result does not necessarily indicate that you will go on to develop antibodies to the virus and an immune response. It is possible that around 10% of people who test positive will not develop an immune response.

Antibody test (Blood Test):

In contrast, antibody tests are blood tests which detect antibodies to the virus as a marker of past infection. A positive test result indicates that a person has previously had the virus at some point.

What do antibody test results mean?

A positive antibody test demonstrates that someone has developed antibodies to the virus. The presence of antibodies signals that the body has staged an immune response to the virus. This usually happens about two weeks after the first symptoms, but may take up to 6 weeks following infection.

A negative test result does not completely rule out the possibility of previous infection with Covid-19 (SARS CoV-2). Samples from very early on in infection can produce negative results, so this test cannot be used to diagnose an acute (current) infection.

Also, over time following infection, antibody levels may decline and eventually become negative. Some people may make an antibody response to Covid-19 infection very slowly or may not produce enough antibodies for the test to become positive.

COVID-19 is a new disease, and our understanding of the body's immune response to it is limited. We do not know, for example, how long an antibody response lasts, nor whether having antibodies means you can't transmit the virus to others. Our understanding of the virus will grow with new scientific studies as evidence emerges.

An antibody test result can only tell an individual whether or not they have had the virus in the past. Antibody tests are also being used currently in surveillance studies, to understand what proportion of the population has already had the virus.

Can this antibody test tell me if I have an infection now or had a recent infection?

The test for antibodies is only reliable for detecting that you had the infection more than two weeks ago.

If you test positive for antibodies, can you ignore national and local guidance about social distancing and wearing PPE?

No. There is no evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. This is the position of the World Health Organisation.

As the presence of antibodies doesn't necessarily mean you are immune, you should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All necessary/appropriate infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

What does a negative antibody test mean?

For most people a negative test will mean that they have not had the infection, if the test was done more than two weeks after the start of symptoms. However, not all infected individuals make enough antibodies to be detected by the current tests – leading to so-called “false negative” results – you may still pass on the virus to other people. So it is important that, whatever the results of the antibody test, you continue to adhere to national and local guidance about social distancing and wearing PPE.

How will I be informed of the result? Results will be sent either to your email address or the mobile phone contact number that you provided at the time of registration.

How will my information be used?

The results gathered across the testing programme will provide information on the prevalence of COVID-19 in different regions of the country and help us better understand how the disease spreads.

Are there any risks to having the test?

There are some risks related to having a blood test, such as feeling dizzy and faint during and after the test but nothing specific to this antibody test. Risks can also include bruising at the venepuncture site. Serious complications such as an infection at the site where blood was taken and phlebitis (swelling of the vein) are possible but generally extremely unlikely.