

## **Increasing COVID-19 testing across the UK**

### **A Parliamentary update from the British In Vitro Diagnostics Association (BIVDA)**

#### **Introduction**

In early April, BIVDA shared a briefing with all Parliamentarians providing an introduction to diagnostic testing, and explaining what the in vitro diagnostics (IVD) industry is doing to support increase COVID-19 testing across the UK.

BIVDA is the national industry association of the manufacturers and distributors of in vitro diagnostic products in the UK, and represents 95% of the industry. We have been closely engaging and working with our members throughout this crisis, and we are confident that with the right support and engagement from Government, our members can meet the Government's target. This briefing sets out:

- An overview of COVID-19 testing
- Working with the Government and the NHS to increase COVID-19 testing
- Next steps

#### **An overview of COVID-19 testing**

As highlighted in our previous briefing, effective testing for COVID-19 will be critical in the fight against the virus, and in the post-pandemic recovery. There are as noted previously two kinds of Covid 19 tests:

Scientists can test for COVID-19 in two ways:<sup>1 2 3</sup>

- 1. Tests to detect the virus itself, to work out who is currently infected.** These are called Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests, and require a swab sample from the upper and lower respiratory tracts, when a patient is exhibiting symptoms
- 2. Tests to detect the antibodies produced in response to the virus, to help identify people who previously had the virus.** These require a sample of the patient's blood. Because of our limited understanding of the virus these tests are currently producing false positive and false negative results, but they can still be critical in helping us understand the population-wide infection rate and who might be immune

It is worth underlining that less than four months ago, COVID-19 and the virus that caused it were unknown. Doctors and scientists are still learning about this disease, how to treat it and how the body responds to it.

The first stage in the response was to rapidly develop a test to start diagnosing infections. In the development of any test, it takes time to optimise its performance to get the best technical specifications. Public Health England followed the right procedure throughout this process, regularly updating NHS laboratories on which test to use and when to move to an improved test. Since the early stages of the pandemic, the testing rate is now increasing using a commercial test supported by procedural improvements and a novel approach. In addition, we are working to 'crowd source' ideas to meet logistical challenges through the Testing Methods Sourcing Platform (see below for more information).

### About the Testing Methods Sourcing Platform

A partnership between the Department of Health and Social Care, BIVDA, the UK Bioindustry Association, and the Royal College of Pathologists to seek new and novel solutions to help deliver 100,000 coronavirus tests a day by the end of April. This online platform is working to gather solutions for end-to-end testing of COVID-19, including:

- Blood collection
- RNA extraction methods
- Increasing laboratory throughput
- Availability of swabs for virus detection
- Utilisation of point of care testing

More information is available here: [www.testingmethods.crowdicity.com](http://www.testingmethods.crowdicity.com)

### Working with the Government and the NHS to increase COVID-19 testing

The IVD industry is determined to play its part in rising up to the national challenge of increasing testing capacity, to 100,000 tests per day. Throughout this pandemic, BIVDA has been closely working with member companies to establish how many tests they are able to do, and working to understand what support they need to increase capacity. We are also engaging with members to understand how we can increase capacity to carry out additional antibody tests, should the Government require them.

Based on our engagement, we know that the IVD industry in the UK has the capacity to scale up production to meet the daily testing targets. However, we do appreciate that there are a number of hurdles that need to be overcome beyond just the creation of the tests themselves. We are therefore working to support the Government in every way we can to reach the COVID-19 testing target and go beyond it.

As an industry we are committed to fully support the increase of COVID-19 testing across the UK by:

- **Scaling up production of proven tests** at a time of massive economic and social challenges
- **Ensuring appropriate supply of consumables** to enable testing
- **Developing additional tests** for COVID-19 (particularly antibody tests)
- **Making testing accessible** to the target groups within the UK population
- **Supporting clinical staff in identifying priority individuals** who need tests

### Next steps

This is the second Parliamentary briefing in our series. In order to provide you with a further update we are arranging video conferences with interested MPs on 5 May 2020. Should you be interested in joining these video conference, or arranging a call separately, please do not hesitate to contact us at [Doris-Ann@bivda.org.uk](mailto:Doris-Ann@bivda.org.uk).

*BIVDA, 22 April 2020*

<sup>1</sup> Verdict Medical Devices, *Different paths to the same destination: screening for Covid 19*, 3 April 2020

<sup>2</sup> The Association for Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine, *ACB expert briefing on Covid 19 diagnosis, patient assessment and monitoring*, 4 April 2020

<sup>3</sup> Science, *The standard coronavirus test, if available, works well – but can new diagnostics help in this pandemic?*, 22 March 2020