NHS Test and Trace

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Department of Health
and Social Care,
39 Victoria Street,
London SW1H 0EU

T 0207 210 4850
www.gov.uk

The Association of the British Pharmaceutical
Industry
Association of British HealthTech Industries
BioIndustry Association
British In Vitro Diagnostics Association

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Dear all,

NHS Test and Trace service

I am writing to you as the Executive Chair of the NHS Test and Trace Service following this week's launch. When I was appointed to lead the programme three weeks ago I knew that core to its success was that we build our service for and with the people using it. I therefore wanted to share with you further detail of our thinking on the programme and ask for your feedback on the proposals.
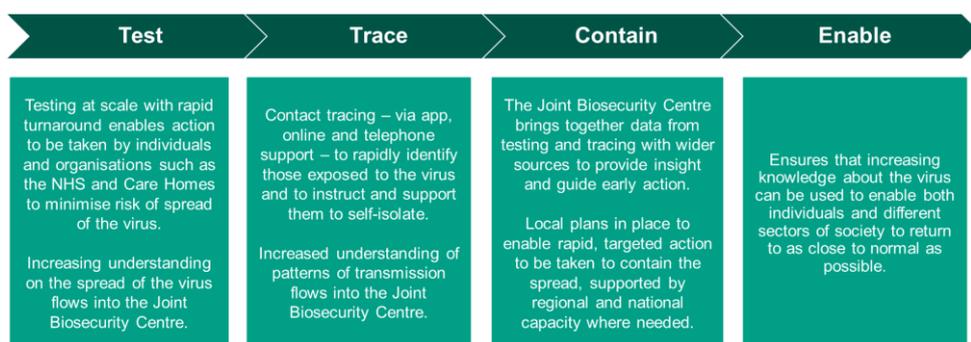
I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support of the testing programme. The diagnostics industry has come forward with an overwhelming response to our call to arms. Testing is an essential part of tackling COVID-19 and your work collaborating with us is key to this success. Together we are growing our world leading diagnostics industry and we thank you for being part of this national effort.

The NHS Test and Trace service forms a central part of the government's COVID-19 recovery strategy, which seeks to return life to as close to normal as possible, for as many people as possible, in a way that is safe and protects our NHS and social care. It provides an end to end service for the public that brings together testing for COVID-19, tracing people who are potentially infectious, support for those who need to self-isolate with action to contain the spread of the virus and potential schemes to enable individuals and businesses to return to more normal ways of life.

Achieving these goals will require fundamental behavioural changes for all of society, including raised awareness of symptoms, prompt booking of tests, continued observation of social distancing rules and diligent commitment to isolation protocols. It is therefore vital that we work together to make this programme a success and enable the further easing of lockdown measures.

As discussed on the webinar today, the diagram below provides a high-level summary of the service and its constituent parts. The rest of this letter sets out my proposed direction of travel for each of these areas and asks for feedback from you as we develop the service.

An Integrated and world-class NHS Test and Trace Programme, designed to control the virus and enable people to live a safer and more normal life.

Test	Trace	Contain	Enable
Testing at scale with rapid turnaround enables action to be taken by individuals and organisations such as the NHS and Care Homes to minimise risk of spread of the virus. Increasing understanding on the spread of the virus flows into the Joint Biosecurity Centre.	Contact tracing – via app, online and telephone support – to rapidly identify those exposed to the virus and to instruct and support them to self-isolate. Increased understanding of patterns of transmission flows into the Joint Biosecurity Centre.	The Joint Biosecurity Centre brings together data from testing and tracing with wider sources to provide insight and guide early action. Local plans in place to enable rapid, targeted action to be taken to contain the spread, supported by regional and national capacity where needed.	Ensures that increasing knowledge about the virus can be used to enable both individuals and different sectors of society to return to as close to normal as possible.

Test

Testing is at the heart of our work to control the virus. It will inform individuals (and their households) if they need to self-isolate to avoid passing the virus to others, help the NHS provide the best possible treatment to those who need it, and help protect residents and staff in high risk environments such as care homes. Testing also gives us vital information to understand the spread of the virus so that even more targeted local action can be taken to anticipate or control outbreaks.

Building on our existing [testing strategy](#), our work on testing will focus on:

- Comprehensiveness – we will continue to develop new ways to deliver tests to individuals and hard to reach groups and expand the capacity of our testing service. We will make sure that we have the required volume of tests needed to control the spread of infection.

- Speed – we will focus on minimising the time it takes to carry out and receive the results of a test. This will help control the spread of the virus by quickly isolating people who are positive and prevent unnecessary 'lockdown' of individuals and their contacts who are not positive.

- Understanding – we will use 'swab' testing, which tells if you have COVID-19, and antibody testing, which tells if you have had COVID-19, to increase our understanding of the virus and its transmission to better control its spread.

- Targeting – we will use the latest clinical and scientific advice to continue to inform how testing should best be targeted to control the virus.

- Reliability – we will work in partnership with industry and academia to ensure a reliable and sustainable testing programme and rapidly deploy new technological advances.

Trace

Building on existing public health expertise and resources, we will be deploying contact tracing at scale to help control the virus. Contact tracing rapidly identifies those exposed to the virus (individuals who have been in close contact with those who have tested positive for the virus) and advises them to self-isolate and get tested if they develop symptoms. This will help close down chains of transmission, protect local communities and increase our understanding of the spread of the disease.

Speed of contact tracing will be vital and we will use a combination of call centre staff, local public health experts and digital technology to contact people who have tested positive and rapidly identify their contacts and instruct them to self-isolate as well.

The new NHS COVID-19 app will significantly extend the speed and reach of contact tracing through, for example, sending anonymous alerts to people who might have been exposed (even those you do not know but have been exposed to) and advising them to self-isolate.

Where someone is self-isolating they will be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay and we will give them information about local support networks for those who need practical, social or emotional support. Local authorities will work with community partners to understand how to continuously improve this

support, drawing from the experience so far of people who have had to self-isolate and their families and carers.

Contain

Through the Joint Biosecurity Centre, which is an integral part of the NHS Test and Trace, we will bring together data from testing and contact tracing, alongside other NHS and public data, to provide insight into local and national patterns of transmission and potential high-risk locations and to identify early potential outbreaks so action can be taken.

The Joint Biosecurity Centre will work with local authorities who will develop, maintain and implement their own local outbreak control plans to contain outbreaks in the community. This work will be guided by 'best practice guides' setting out potential measures that may be appropriate to take in specific circumstances or sectors.

Local responses will be organised through networks that include local government, Public Health England, the NHS, voluntary and charitable organisations, faith groups, trade and sports associations.

Local action may include temporary closure of individual locations to enable deep cleaning, rapid deployment of mobile testing units, and targeted communications in specific settings or localities. Where necessary, action will be escalated to regional or national level.

The Joint Biosecurity Centre will also be responsible for setting the COVID-19 alert level, providing an independent assessment of the current level of risk both nationally and in different localities. It will advise the Chief Medical Officers of a change in the COVID-19 alert level who will then advise Ministers. This information will help inform decisions to ease restrictions in a safe way.

Enable

As we learn more about the virus, its patterns of transmission and the antibody response for people who have had the virus, we will be able to use that increasing knowledge to help enable both individuals and different sectors of society to return to as close to normal life as possible. This will happen in conjunction with ongoing scientific and medical developments that may speed the process.

Implementing a comprehensive NHS Test and Trace service

We are implementing NHS Test and Trace on a phased basis. Over the coming weeks and months, we will continue to strengthen the service. At every step of the way, we will:

- Engage with and provide clear communications for the public who have already clearly demonstrated during the lockdown that they want to take every opportunity to support the mission to beat COVID-19.
- Work with local government and all parts of the NHS and social care to design and deliver local solutions, supported by national insight and specialist skills, to protect local communities.
- Work with businesses and employers to ensure NHS Test and Trace helps create safer workplaces.
- Base everything we do on expert scientific, medical and technical advice. In particular, the programme will work closely with the Chief Medical Officer, Government Chief Scientific Adviser and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and be informed by NHS Test and Trace's own Ethics Advisory Board.

The success of NHS Test and Trace will depend on our ability to identify who has got the disease and quickly break the chain of infection through isolation. We therefore intend to measure our performance by (i) the time from an individual receiving a positive test result to identifying and contacting their contacts and (ii) the proportion of people with a confirmed COVID-19 test result who have already been identified through contact tracing and are self-isolating.

This will tell us whether we are succeeding in tracing people exposed to the virus, stamping out any flare ups in infection and breaking the chain of transmission.

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I hope that this letter has been of help in setting out our thinking on how the different elements of NHS Test and Trace fit together. This service has been organised in a very short time and we will need to improve it and evolve as we go. We have been engaging with a number of you at a range of levels over the past few weeks and will be looking to formalise this engagement going forwards.

In the meantime, I would welcome your feedback on the direction of travel set out in this letter, and the immediate priorities you see to both scale and improve this service. Please do send your feedback to your trade body who will share with us.

Thank you for your help and support and I look forward to building a world beating service with you that enables us all to return to a more normal way of life.

Best wishes

Dido Harding