Staff Information / FAQs – Antibody Testing COVID-19

What is an antibody?
An antibody is a protein within the blood that is part of the body's immune response to an infection, in this case COVID-19

What is an antibody test?
An antibody test can tell someone whether they have had an immune response to the virus that causes COVID-19 in the past, by analysing a blood sample.

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.

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 have protection form further infections with COVID**. Our understanding of the virus will grow as new scientific evidence and studies emerge.

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 have already had the virus.

Results of the antibody test will not affect use of PPE or your occupation; you will continue to work within the guidelines for COVID-19.

If you test positive for antibodies, can you ignore lockdown restrictions and stop using PPE?
No. There is no evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. You should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

How will my information be used?
The anonymised results across the testing programme will provide information on the prevalence of COVID-19 in different regions of the country and help better understand how the disease spreads. The results will not form part of your occupational record.

Your GP will be able to access the results of your antibody testing as it may affect any future treatment you receive or any ongoing clinical care.

The results of testing may be shared with organisations such as Public Health England to form part of the national information gathering in relation to COVID- 19.

Are there any risks to having the blood 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.

Which staff can have the test?

The antibody test is available to social care staff in Worcestershire. All our testing areas will be appropriately socially-distanced.

How do staff arrange to have the test?

Staff can book a test through their registered GP surgery (see list of those participating.) If not registered with a participating GP, appointments are available at 2 community hospitals in the county.

What if I have had a swab that was negative, but my antibody test has come back positive?

The antibody test is very accurate. It is possible that either you were not infected at the time the swab was taken, or the swab did not detect the virus.

If my test comes back negative, what does that mean?

A negative result means that the test has not detected antibodies to COVID-19 in your blood. Based on this test result, we do not know if you have had COVID-19 infection. A negative test means one of these options:

1. You have never had the infection, or

2. You have had the infection but have not produced antibodies against the virus, or

3. You have had the infection but the antibodies that you produced were not detected by this test

What if I have had a swab confirming I had COVID-19, but my antibody test is negative?

It is possible to have had COVID-19, and not have detectable antibodies on this test. It is thought that in up to 20% of people with confirmed COVID-19 infection, we will not be able to detect antibodies in their blood and they will have a negative result on this blood test.

If I have a positive test when did I have the infection?

The antibody test only tells you whether you have had the infection in the past. It is not able to indicate a time frame of infection.

If I have a positive test does that mean I can give COVID-19 to my family or the people I care for?

A positive test result indicates you have had the infection in the past. If you receive a positive antibody result it does not mean that you're immune, or that you cannot pass on the virus to others. If you have recovered from a coronavirus infection you should continue to follow physical distancing measures and self-isolation advice if you develop new symptoms to protect others.

Even when you know you have had the virus, the only way to reduce the risk of you becoming ill, or passing the disease on to others you care about, is to follow the latest government advice on controlling the spread of the virus. All infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

If I have a positive test do I have to self-isolate or stay away from work?

No, you do not need to self-isolate. Having the antibodies does not mean you have a current infection, or the ability to infect other people. However, regardless of your antibody results, you will need to self-isolate if:

- You are currently symptomatic
- You develop symptoms in the future
- You have had a nose and throat swab during the past ten days and the swab was reported positive.

If you are currently moving home and undertaking any new life assurance/health related policies, we would recommend that you contact your provider to ensure there are no implications.