

From: Professor John Newton
National Testing Coordinator

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Procurement of antibody tests for return-to-work

In response to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 virus, some organisations have sought to acquire antibody tests to help facilitate the swift and safe return of their staff to work.

I fully understand this desire; however, I must caution that these antibody tests are brand new and still in development. As such, there is not yet a test that has been proven to work as a “return-to-work” test for Covid-19 as we would require through our ongoing validation experiments. I therefore advise organisations, both in the public and private sector, against the use of antibody tests that have not been verified in a laboratory setting. The results of an inaccurate test are potentially misleading and can put people at risk of contracting the disease and transmitting it to others. The Chief Medical Officer’s advice is that he strongly discourages the use of unvalidated tests.

This is an emerging area of science and technology and companies and scientists are doing everything they can to improve the accuracy of the tests on the market. Our search for a more accurate return-to-work test and validation exercise is ongoing.

I appreciate that this news may be frustrating and comes at a time when there are extraordinary demands being placed on everyone. However, it is essential that the quality, accuracy and effectiveness of antibody tests remains our priority.

Please be assured that the Government, supported by world-leading experts and regulators, are continuing to work hard to rapidly deliver a reliable and accurate antibody return-to-work testing kit, to counter the spread of the virus and facilitate people returning to work safely. We are committed to making the results of these experiments public as soon as we can. I will keep you fully updated on the progress of this work.

Please ensure this message is circulated to your relevant agencies and arm’s length bodies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Newton', written over a horizontal line.

Professor John Newton
National Testing Coordinator