

# COVID19 antibody (Serology) testing

GPs and Community Services | Ipswich, East Suffolk and North East Essex

4<sup>th</sup> April 2020

## Introduction

Antibody (serology) tests for COVID19 is available from Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020 for patients registered with you. This communication explains what this test can (and cannot) do, the arrangements for testing and getting results.

## What is the antibody (serology) test?

This is a blood test to detect an immune response to the SARS-COV-2 virus, which is the cause of the COVID19 pandemic. If the test is positive, it means that you have had this virus at some time. The antibody test will remain positive for a long time after infection.

It is different from the *antigen* (swab) test, which detects the virus itself. The antigen test is only positive during the period of infection.

The scientific understanding of this virus is at an early stage. We do not yet fully understand what a positive antibody test means in terms of immunity and future risk from COVID-19. At the moment, tests are only for the purpose of increasing our understanding of who has (or has not) had an immune response. Therefore, tests are entirely voluntary – there is no clinical indication for testing. **Consent must be obtained from each patient and recorded in the notes.**

## Consent

National example text for consent includes the following:

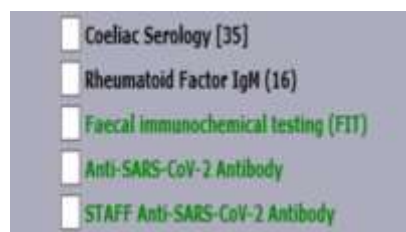
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and I consent for this procedure.
- I have had the opportunity to consider the information provided and can confirm that I understand the nature and purpose of this procedure, together with the benefits and risks.
- I have confirmed that a positive test will not mean at this point that I am immune and therefore I will continue to behave as if I might get or pass on the infection

Please note, that in line with national guidance, test samples may be stored for a year or more. They may be used as part of further research or to help establish other tests in the future.

## Ordering tests

All tests must be booked via your Primary Care System (SystemOne™, EMIS or Microtest) using ICE. You can only order tests for registered patients. Paper requests will be rejected – we are unable to accommodate these due to the high volume of samples we are handling.

The test for Serology antibodies can be found on the most common test panel within ICE, on the right hand side:

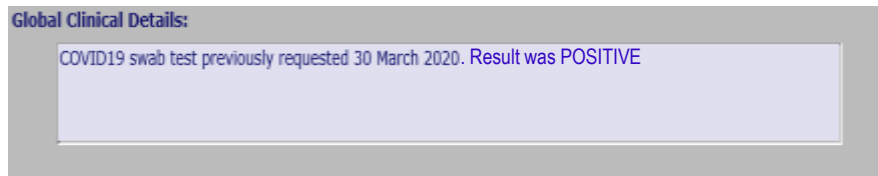


## Tests for NHS staff

We will be gradually rolling out community 'NHS family' testing from the week of 8<sup>th</sup> June. In the meantime, if a member of NHS staff is registered as a patient in your practice, you can test them as a patient. Please choose the 'STAFF Anti-SARS-CoV-2 Antibody' test for these people. This is important so that we can distinguish the results for staff from those of patients to help us understand more about the transmission of this disease.

## Clinical Details

Please record any clinical history of COVID-19 symptoms or previous positive swab results, including dates of these, in the clinical detail box. This is very important to help us improve our understanding of the antibody response:



## Test results

- The clinician requesting the test will be responsible for communicating results to the patient as normal.
- Results will not be communicated in any other way.

## What does a positive antibody test mean?

At the moment, our understanding of what a positive result means is limited. It does mean that the patient has had an immune response to this virus at some time.

**⚠ It does not mean that the patient is immune to the virus.** The evidence is not yet clear on this. Patients must continue to follow all guidance on social distancing, self-isolation and PPE as appropriate.

## What does a negative antibody test mean?

It means that the patient has not had an immune response to the virus. That means that they are unlikely to have been previously infected with COVID19.

## What does an equivocal test mean?

It means that the test was not clearly positive or negative. The patient is unlikely to have been previously infected with COVID19.

- You should request a repeat test if the result is equivocal. Repeat testing is not advised in other circumstances.

## Phlebotomy Services

ESNEFT phlebotomy capacity is being used to undertake in-patient and staff testing. There is very limited outpatient phlebotomy at present and we are reserving this for our vulnerable and immunocompromised patients. **As such we are unable to offer outpatient phlebotomy for this new test.** You will need to make arrangements to take blood samples from your own patients.

We are hoping to offer community staff testing on a gradual roll-out from next week, this will be confirmed as soon as possible.

**ESNEFT Pathology Services  
June 2020**