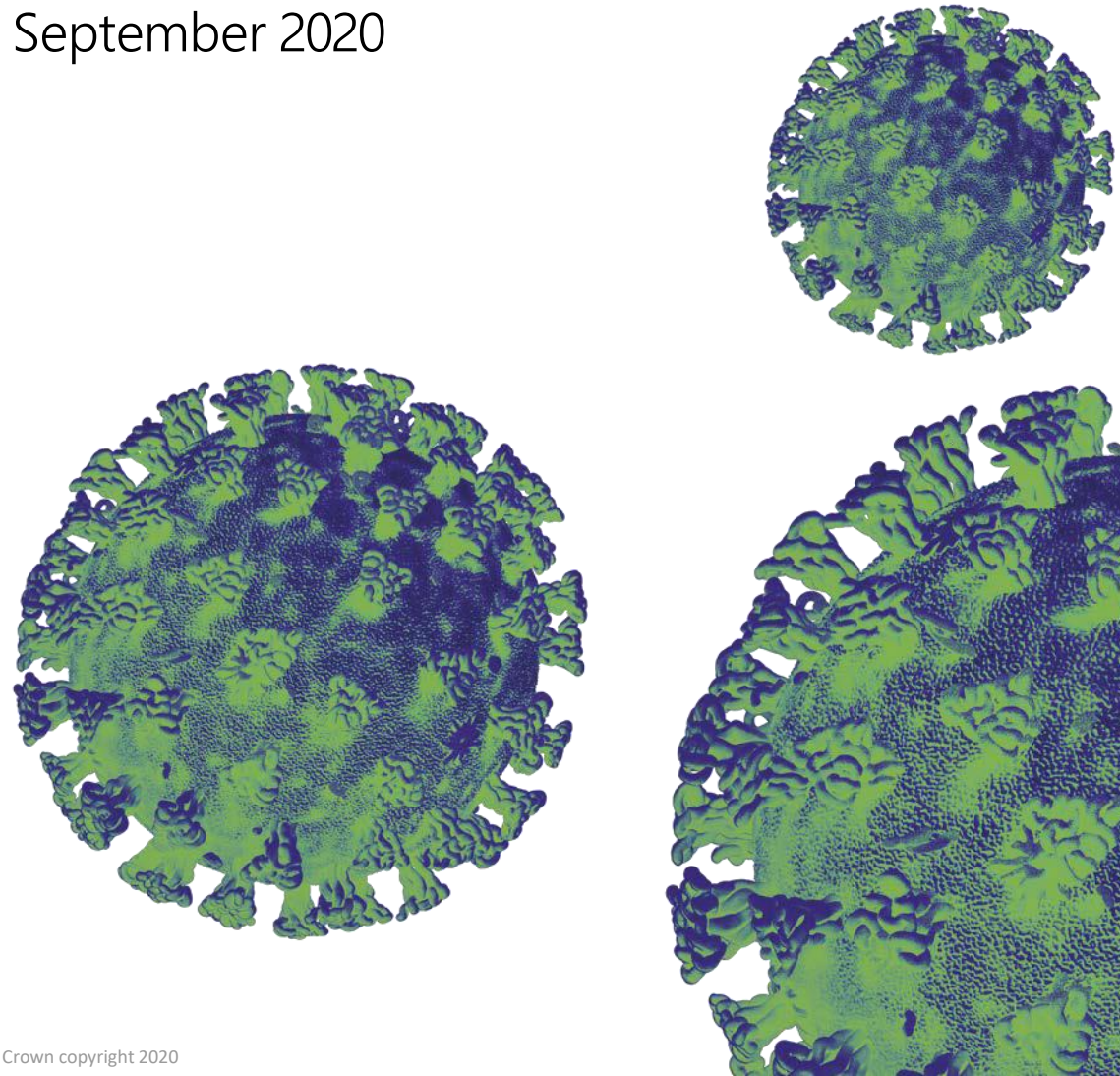
Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Technical Advisory Group

Consensus Statement on Testing Travellers Returning to Wales from Areas of High Prevalence

11 September 2020



Technical Advisory Group: Consensus Statement on Testing Travellers Returning to Wales from Areas of High Prevalence

- The Technical Advisory Group discussed testing on travellers arriving in Wales from areas of high prevalence on 4, 8 and 11 September 2020.

- Preventing the introduction of new infections into a population from outside of that population is a fundamental element of effective disease control.

- Recent reported experience in Wales from contact tracing and testing demonstrates that a significant number of cases have been imported into Wales from countries and regions of the UK that have a higher incidence of SARS-CoV2 infections.

- One flight from Zakynthos initially recorded seven active infections. Following testing of the passengers the number of positives associated with the flight rose to 32.

- Due to the low level of community transmission in most areas of Wales, inward travel is seeding a significant proportion of new clusters of infections.

- Evidence suggests that a minority of travellers, particularly those engaged in higher risk activities (e.g. nightclubbing, not social distancing or keeping contacts low) are responsible for the majority of imported infections in Wales.

- The same individuals have also been shown to not engage in contact tracing or quarantine even when testing positive. Also some return travellers continue to actively ignore public health advice and maintain high levels of contacts and risky behaviour even when symptomatic.

- As such, TAG agreed that further public health interventions will help identify new infections and prevent further seeding events and clusters forming in Wales.

- The recommendation for sequential testing of travellers from high prevalence areas are consistent with SAGE advice published in 18 June and 27 August 2020:
    - Minutes of 42nd SAGE meeting
    - SAGE Consensus Statement on Mass Testing
    - SPI-M-I Consensus Statement dated 17th June 2020
    - PHE modelling cell report on the effectiveness of ‘double-testing’ travellers to the UK
    - Report on minimising the risk of releasing falsely negative individuals from traveller quarantine

- Testing to detect SARS-CoV-2 virus (using an RT-PCR test) in asymptomatic individuals when prevalence of active infections are high is consistent with TAG advice published on 15 July 2020. https://gov.wales/technical-advisory-cell-principles-using-rt-pcr-test-detect-sars-cov-2

Recommendations:

- The principle of testing travellers destined for Wales from countries or regions of higher prevalence should be agreed and implemented where appropriate.

- Such travellers should commence quarantine with associated testing as soon as possible upon entry to the United Kingdom.

- Current testing methods and associated guidelines in place at the time of implementation should be considered and applied.

- Sampling should take place at two time points. The sample for the first test should be taken within 1 day of return to the UK. The sample for the second test should be taken at least 7 days after the first. This recommendation is based on the assumption that quarantine begins on the same day as arrival.

- The second test would not be required if the first sample taken on day 1 is positive. People who test positive should follow existing guidance on self-isolation in the case of a positive test.

- Consideration should be given to the option of rescinding the requirement for continued quarantine where both samples yield negative results in those circumstances where this would be appropriate. Care and consideration should be given regarding consistent messaging for wider quarantine requirements, including those associated with the Test, Trace and Protect (TTP) programme.

- This testing should be mandatory with enforcement via cross check with flight or ferry manifests.

- Consideration should be made on the route of testing that provides the highest return rate, recognising that operational delivery and logistics must be considered fully. **These could include:**

    - testing at point of entry;
    - provision of home testing kits at point of entry;
    - testing on return to home address

- Each testing option has benefits and dis-benefits, e.g. convenience for returning travellers, infrastructure required, testing capacity and turnaround time. Implementation will need to consider the related issues of compliance and enforcement.

- This requirement for testing should also apply to international students arriving in Wales. This should be considered alongside wider policy discussion on HE/FE in Wales.

- Consideration of applying the same principle to travellers from areas of higher incidence from elsewhere in the UK. There is recognition that this might be more challenging.

- Where possible, the above testing should also include testing for influenza viruses through multiplex testing with the results being integrated into existing influenza surveillance pathways.

- Genetic sequencing of positive samples should be used to inform understanding of the role of external sources of infection in the epidemiology of COVID-19 in Wales.

- Discussion should be sought with colleagues in UK administrations with the aim of ensuring a consistent and coordinated approach. This should include the collection, collation and sharing of associated testing data.

- Similarly, the testing proposed here should be coordinated and integrated with any other testing of this cohort, e.g. surveillance testing led by the Office of National Statistics.