

INFORMATION: TEMPORARY REMOVAL OF CONFIRMATORY PCR

Dear colleague,

In follow up to the letter from Minister Donelan sent 21 January, I wanted to update you regarding changes to the requirement for a routine confirmatory PCR test, following positive LFD results.

Due to the high prevalence of coronavirus infections in England, confirmatory testing will be temporarily removed for LFD tests taken at Higher Education asymptomatic test sites until prevalence lowers again. This change is due to take place on Wednesday 27 January 2021.

Prevalence of infections throughout England is currently above 1% and is expected to remain at these levels for at least two months. PHE recommends that as COVID-19 prevalence rate is above 1%, the performance (positive predictive value) of Innova LFDs and PCRs are broadly comparable for measuring viral loads of infectiousness and expected to be indistinguishable when used at test sites, significantly reducing the need for routine PCR confirmatory testing.

Confirmatory testing was introduced to reduce the number of people self-isolating unnecessarily after receiving a false positive result from LFD tests. This is because in areas of prevalence lower than 1%, there is a higher likelihood of false positive results.

Notification of positive LFD results will trigger the legal duty to self-isolate, self-isolation payments and contact tracing. LFD testing offers a significant advantage in allowing for more rapid isolation of infectious people and contact tracing.

Where testing is completed via self-reporting rather than an asymptomatic test site, a confirmatory PCR is still required. Utilising confirmatory PCR in settings that use a self-reporting tool will minimise the risk that incorrectly reported positive results are registered. Confirmatory PCR testing will also be used for vaccine and LFD testing surveillance, genome sequencing and for self-administered tests.

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COVID testing in Higher Education