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To: All Community Pharmacies

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Dear Colleagues,

COVID TESTING IN PHARMACY SETTINGS

We are aware that a number of pharmacies are offering testing for COVID-19. These tests typically require a swab or other type of sample such as serum, plasma or finger-prick whole blood to be taken. Some of these devices test for the presence of the COVID-19 virus while others test for the presence of COVID-19 antibodies.

Rapid point of care tests for use in community pharmacies

At present Public Health advice is that use of products that give a rapid result is not advised because there is little evidence on the accuracy of rapid point of care tests, or on how a patient's antibody response develops or changes during COVID-19 infection and it is not known whether either a positive or negative result is reliable. There is currently no published evidence about the suitability of these rapid point of care tests for diagnosing COVID-19 infection in a community setting.¹ The link between the presence of antibodies and immunity is not proven, and some tests are not specific for COVID-19 antibodies. These two facts mean that a positive test result for antibodies does not necessarily mean that the person being tested is immune to COVID-19.

Laboratory-based COVID-19 testing

Some pharmacies may be offering tests which involve collecting a fingerprick blood sample which is subsequently sent to a laboratory for analysis after which the results are returned directly to the patient. The MHRA has asked providers of laboratory-based COVID-19 antibody testing services using

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-rapid-tests-for-use-in-community-pharmacies-or-at-home/covid-19-rapid-tests-for-use-in-community-pharmacies-or-at-home>

capillary blood collected by a fingerprick, to temporarily stop providing such services until home collection of this sample type has been properly assessed and validated for use with these laboratory tests.²

Tests for home use

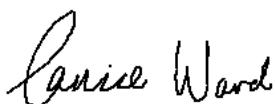
No home testing kits have received a CE mark and there are no testing kits available in the UK for home use. This means it is currently unlawful to supply such tests for use by members of the public. This may change when CE-marked home testing kits become available. Members of the public should not purchase or use home testing kits. It is important to note that home testing should not be confused with the use of a sampling kit at home, as mentioned above.³

Summary

Using the wrong type of testing kit in the wrong setting can lead to inaccurate results, a false sense of protection or recovery and increased pressure on our HSC services.

Pharmacists are advised to operate according to recommendations from Public Health and MHRA recommendations, within the law and within their own professional competence. At all times pharmacists must ensure they are aware of, and adhere to, all relevant legislation, current standards and guidance which apply to their practice.

Yours sincerely



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Department of Health



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² https://www.gov.uk/government/news/action-taken-to-halt-sales-of-fingerprick-coronavirus-covid-19-antibody-testing-kits?utm_source=bf96df9d-bd02-4543-b018-6c56fe49e0d5&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-tests-and-testing-kits-for-coronavirus-covid-19-work-for-patients-the-public-and-professional-users-a-guide-to-covid-19-tests-and-testing-kits>