



Dear Colleague

**DISCONTINUATION OF PCR SURVEILLANCE TESTING  
FOR NON-HOSPITALISED PATIENTS PRESCRIBED  
COVID-19 MEDICINES**

1. In June 2022, we wrote to inform you that non-hospitalised patients who were prescribed directly acting COVID-19 medicines (antivirals and/or monoclonal antibodies) should be encouraged to take two PCR tests for sequencing for surveillance purposes, (see DL(2022)22 paragraph 15-17 available at [https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/dl/DL\(2022\)22.pdf](https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/dl/DL(2022)22.pdf) )
2. We have been working with Public Health Scotland on the Respiratory Surveillance Programme and have reviewed this policy as part of our ongoing work. Under the current testing strategy, only about 0.1% of eligible patients in Scotland successfully completed pre- and post-treatment testing. Such small numbers do not provide enough information on the possible effects of antiviral or monoclonal antibody therapy on driving viral evolution.
3. As a result of this review, and with agreement of the Therapeutics Surveillance Steering Group, we have decided to stop the routine sequencing of this cohort with immediate effect.
4. **Those who are eligible for COVID-19 treatments are no longer required to order PCR tests for sequencing from the 119 phone service or online.**
5. We are continuing to work with PHS to ensure that we monitor COVID-19 variants and mutations, including those that may come from the use of COVID-19 medicines.

**DL (2023) 07  
14 March 2023**

**Addressees**

For action

Medical Directors, NHS Boards  
and Special Health Boards  
Directors of Pharmacy, NHS Boards  
and Special Health Boards

For information

Chief Executives, NHS Boards  
Chief Executive, NHS 24  
Scottish General Practice Committee  
Community Pharmacy Scotland  
General practitioners and their teams  
Community pharmacists and their teams  
Out of Hours service providers

**Enquiries to:**

Future Threats  
& Surveillance Team

Tel: 0300 244 4000

E-mail:

[futurethreatsandsurveillance@gov.scot](mailto:futurethreatsandsurveillance@gov.scot)



## LFD testing for diagnosis

6. Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing will remain available free-of-charge to those who have a health condition that means they may be eligible for COVID-19 treatments when required. These patients should continue to keep a pack of LFDs at home to use only if they develop symptoms. These tests can be ordered from <http://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests> or by calling 119.

## Persistent infection

7. Patients with significant immunosuppression (particularly hypogammaglobulinemia or after B cell suppression therapy) may fail to clear infection with SARS-CoV-2. In such persistently infected patients, there is a theoretical risk that selection of viral mutants better able to resist immune clearance may occur. If you have clinical concerns about a patient with such persisting infection, it is advised that you discuss the value of sequencing with your local Consultant in Infectious Diseases or Virology.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sir Gregor Smith  
**Chief Medical Officer**



Professor Alison Strath  
**Chief Pharmaceutical Officer**