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**Personal advice for team members**

**Covid-19 (Coronavirus) antibody testing for primary care staff**

A word about vocabulary

To make this easier to read, we will use the word ‘Coronavirus’ below. Technically, there are many different Coronaviruses. The particular virus that is causing the pandemic is SARS-CoV-2 or nCov-2019. The disease it causes is called Covid-19. Really, they are pointing to the same thing.

* You may have heard the announcement on 25 May that NHS staff (that includes you) can now get Coronavirus antibody test on the NHS. [1]
* This is different from the Coronavirus PCR test. PCR test is a swab from the nose and throat and it looks for the virus itself. The NHS does PCR test on people with symptoms at present.
* The test looks for Coronavirus IgG antibody, which your immune system would produce if your body was exposed to virus. IgG usually appears 2-4 weeks after the illness. There are many other antibodies in your blood, for example chicken pox IgG, rubella IgG.
* A positive result (that is, Coronavirus IgG antibody is present) means you had been infected with Coronavirus at one time. You may remember being unwell, or you may not have felt anything.
* Previous infection does not guarantee that you will not get infected again. At present, scientists do not know enough about Coronavirus and immunity. In general, antibodies do protect against future infection, but only if the level is high enough – for example even after Hepatitis B vaccine we still have to check our Hepatitis B immunity from time to time. Also the old antibodies will only protect you if the virus does not mutate into a new type – for example we need a new flu jab every year.
* The test is not compulsory, and we do not have a policy on Coronavirus immunity for our team (not yet anyway).
* If you decide to take the test, you need to have a blood sample taken from your vein. (The NHS is not using the instant test which only requires a finger prick.) At the moment, GPs have to book appointments at the hospital for blood sampling.
* Team members can have the test arranged from this surgery. This includes part time staff and locums. if you are not registered here, we can refer you as a temporary patient. Alternatively, you can ask your own GP to arrange the blood sample.
* The result will come back to the surgery that referred you for the test. It is probably a good idea for your GP to know if you tested positive. However, it will not affect your employment record at this surgery.
* After that we do not know what else happens to the data. The IgG shows up a few weeks after infection happened, so it is not useful for contact tracing.
* Whether you choose to have the test or not, you should still follow good hygiene rules and social distancing rules in the workplace.
* This is not part of assessment of your risk at work. The offer to test for antibody is a separate matter. Common sense tells us that having antibody will give you some protection against coronavirus, but scientists are not yet sure about that. Please see the other document on risk assessment.

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Reference:

1. Antibody testing programme roll out for NHS staff and patients: Letter from Pauline Philip and Professor Steven Powis
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/antibody-testing-programme-roll-out-for-nhs-staff-and-patients-letter-from-pauline-philip-and-professor-steven-powis/>