

Health and Sport Committee COVID-19 testing survey: RCN Scotland response

1. What role should testing play in helping to tackle the pandemic?

We would like to see the Scottish Government go further on testing and roll out more routine testing for health and care workers, care home residents and hospital patients, whether or not they have COVID-19 symptoms (subject to individual consent), to help detect cases early, reduce and prevent transmission in hospital and community health settings and better protect staff and the patients they care for.

While the Scottish Government emphasises that all health and care workers can access testing through the NHS, this is aimed at confirming whether someone has the virus if they or a family members are showing symptoms and therefore whether they can return to work or must continue to self-isolate.

We note the research published by Imperial College London on 23 April which estimates that weekly screening of healthcare workers and other at-risk groups irrespective of symptoms, would reduce their contribution to transmission by 25-33 per cent, on top of reductions achieved by self-isolation following symptoms.¹

Expanding testing in this way would also reduce anxiety amongst staff that they could be unknowingly spreading the virus if they are either asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic. We continue to receive calls from RCN members who are concerned that they could be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic, as they have been working with a patient or colleague who later tested positive for the virus. We know from these calls that there continues to be confusion about access to testing and whether or not you can be tested if you are not symptomatic. Some examples from our members are included below:

- *I am a nurse working in a large NHS hospital. Two of my colleagues one of which I have worked closely with has recently tested positive for COVID 19. My managers have informed me that I will not be tested unless I display symptoms of COVID and I am to continue working. Please can you tell me if my managers have a duty of care to staff and patients that we are offered tests? If this was in a home setting then I would be isolating and if the new COVID alert app was active I would have been alerted & isolating.*
- *I have been told my boss in my district nursing team has been tested positive for this. I am wondering if we will all soon be tested or have the capacity too as worried I am taking this into different houses.*
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