



## Your antibody blood test questions answered

### What is an antibody test?

An antibody test can tell someone whether they have had the virus that causes Covid-19 in the past, by analysing a blood sample. It differs from virus testing, which can tell someone whether they have the virus currently.

### What do antibody test results mean?

A positive antibody test demonstrates that someone has developed antibodies to the virus. The presence of antibodies signals that the body has staged an immune response to the virus.

Covid-19 is a new disease, and our understanding of the body's immune response to it is limited. We do not know, for example, how long an antibody response lasts, nor whether having antibodies means you can't transmit the virus to others. Our understanding of the virus will grow as new scientific evidence and studies emerge.

An antibody test result can only tell an individual whether or not they have had the virus in the past. Antibody tests are also being used currently in surveillance studies, to understand what proportion of the population have already had the virus.

### If you test positive for antibodies, can you ignore lockdown restrictions?

No. There is no evidence yet to suggest that those who have been proven to have had the virus are immune. This is the position of the World Health Organisation. You should continue to comply with social distancing measures and government guidelines. All infection prevention and control measures must continue to be in place irrespective of the presence of antibodies.

### How will I be informed of the result?

Communication of the result is the responsibility of EEAST through local Covid-19 leads. The results will not go on your employment record. Your GP should be able to access the result if required and according to local information sharing protocols.

### How will my information be used?

The anonymised results across the testing programme will provide information on the prevalence of COVID-19 in different regions of the country and help better understand how the disease spreads.

### Are there any risks to having the test?

There are some risks related to having a blood test, such as feeling dizzy and faint during and after the test but nothing specific to this antibody test. Risks can also include bruising at the venepuncture site.

### Will we be prioritising staff for blood testing?

No. The test will be available immediately, starting Friday 29 May, for all staff across the Trust who wish to take part. Timing of appointments will be subject to operational requirements so as to keep disruption to normal working routines to a minimum.

### Will the test be a pin prick or a needle?

The test requires a blood sample, which will be taken by a qualified clinician.

### What will I be asked to consent to?

The consent form you will be asked to sign has the following content:

- I confirm that I have read the above information; I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I consent for this procedure.
- I have had the opportunity to consider the information and can confirm that I understand the nature and purpose of this procedure, together with the benefits and risks.
- I have confirmed a positive test will not mean at this point that I am immune and therefore I will continue to behave as if I might get or pass on the infection
- I declare that the information I have given on this form is correct and complete.

### Is there a quota that the Trust is trying to hit?

No. We do not have an overall target for the number of blood tests that we aim to carry out and the number is not capped. We are limited only by the capacity of our staff to conduct the tests safely and effectively. We are confident that everyone who wishes to take part and be tested will be accommodated over the next few weeks.

### Will the opportunity for antibody testing be rolled out to volunteers?

Yes, this is our plan but we expect staff working at our stations and bases to fill up most of the available booking slots in the early stages of our testing programme.

### Will EEAST be testing members of the public and can I bring members of my family for testing?

No, at the moment, only members of staff and others connected with or working for the Trust can be tested by EEAST to make sure that we don't exhaust our capacity to carry out the tests

### Will the Covid coordination centre have the capacity to manage?

We have worked hard to ensure that we can fully resource our testing programme to the best of our capabilities in terms of bookings, kit and personnel. As in all these situations, there may be teething problems until we are fully up and running but we hope to sort out any issues as quickly as possible. We have also introduced an online booking system given the number of telephone enquiries we have had.

### What happens if a member of staff tests positive for antibodies but had no symptoms and continued to work and saw patients and colleagues?

This is not a track and trace programme. The antibody test will only identify if an individual has had the virus that causes Covid-19 at some point in the past. The Trust has many other protocols and processes based on national guidance in place to minimise any potential risk from Covid-19 to colleagues and patients.

### **If I test positive for antibodies does this mean I am immune to Covid 19?**

There is no strong evidence yet to suggest that those who have had the virus develop long-lasting immunity which would prevent them from getting the virus again. The value of antibody tests is currently limited to answering the question of whether someone has had the virus or not, and providing data and a greater understanding on the spread of the virus.

### **Will there be adequate social distancing safeguards in place at antibody testing sites?**

Yes, our plans for blood testing staff will observe all of the Trust's current guidance on social distancing and respect for colleagues in the workplace.

### **Have our union representatives been consulted on this?**

Yes, our senior management is in regular dialogue with staff side representatives and they in full support of this programme of antibody testing.

### **Why has EEAST been asked to take part?**

The ambulance service has been asked to take a leading role in helping to map the distribution of Covid-19 because of the special characteristics of the organisation.

EEAST has a large staff (in common with other ambulance trusts) across urban and rural settings and is part of the NHS, we are seen as a key organisation to allow epidemiologists to gather a bigger picture of the "serology" – the extent of antibodies in regional populations.

*Information correct as at 29th May 2020*