
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Lucy Vickers
Head of Profession
Department of Health and Social Care
(by email)

08 April 2021

Dear Lucy

Weekly statistics for rapid asymptomatic testing in England

As you are aware, we recently undertook a rapid review of the [weekly statistics for rapid asymptomatic testing](#). All data around COVID-19 are of high public and media interest. Multiple sources of data and differences in these can impact on trust in the data. This publication allows transparency around the scaling up of the lateral flow testing program and as such is important for accountability and public trust.

We welcome the development of this publication, especially the collaboration between yourselves and the Department for Education which allows for a shared view and supports public trust in this narrative. It is also good that you are engaging with the Royal Statistical Society to get expert insight from a range of users, however we would encourage you to expand your user engagement to cover a more diverse set of users.

While transparency is important and a valid reason in its own right for publishing, it would be helpful if the purpose was more clearly stated in the publication along with guidance on what the data can and cannot be used for. Additionally, there are a few ways both transparency and public value can be enhanced. For example, we understand the concerns around the reporting of positivity rates; however, as they are being calculated by others such as government departments and by members of the public, we would encourage you to better explain the reasons why these are inappropriate and make this explanation more visible in the publication while working towards effectively dealing with the duplication and quality issues to allow such analysis to be included in future. In relation to this, additional links to supporting information, such as evidence on the specificity and sensitivity of the lateral flow test, would enhance value.

It is encouraging to hear that you are looking at adding statistics on the number of people undergoing tests. In cases where consent is involved, the calculation of the eligible population may be difficult, but this would be valuable information to include. The development plan included within the report was very useful and we would encourage you

to expand on this, including any analysis that you hope to add. Where this turns out not to be possible then the reasons why can be highlighted here and if this is due to quality or coherence issues then this additional context will help stop misuse of the data.

Given the highly changeable nature of policy on testing, your team is to be commended for managing to continuously quality assure data before releasing it. This level of accuracy is vital for such a sensitive area even if at times, it might be at the expense of timeliness. We look forward to seeing the publication develop and we will be glad to provide further advice and support.

I am copying this letter to David Simpson, Deputy Head of Profession at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written over a light grey horizontal line.

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation