

New surveillance system for early detection of COVID-19

A new surveillance system to detect cases of COVID-19 in England has been established by Public Health England (PHE) and the NHS to strengthen existing systems and to prepare for and prevent wider transmission of the virus.

There is no current evidence to show that the virus is circulating in the community in England, but internationally there is evidence of wider transmission of the virus in areas outside of China, most recently Italy and South Korea.

This new surveillance strategy will enable PHE to identify early evidence of spread within England, if this occurs.

Some NHS hospitals have been asked to take part, which would see them implementing the new surveillance at their intensive care units (ICU) and Severe Respiratory Failure (ECMO) Centres.

Samples will be tested from patients with severe respiratory infections who do not meet the [current case definition for COVID-19](#). Depending on the results, patients will be given the support they need and rapid public health actions will be taken.

A programme of testing with a network of around 100 primary care sites across England will also complement the detection system in hospitals, so that both mild and more unwell cases can be found.

Professor Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director, Public Health England, said:

We have taken a belt and braces approach throughout this outbreak. This new system is another important way we can help limit the impact of COVID-19 in the UK, as we continue to ensure we have the best possible intelligence to protect the public's health.

There is no change in risk for the public but taking this preparatory step now will enable us to better detect and contain the spread of the virus. The UK's infection control procedures are world-leading, and the system we are announcing today further strengthens our response.

This process will not apply to patients meeting the current COVID-19 case definition, who will continue to be isolated and tested as appropriate, and test result times will not be affected.

PHE and the NHS have tried and tested surveillance systems in place to

monitor and manage the spread of community transmission of seasonal influenza each year.