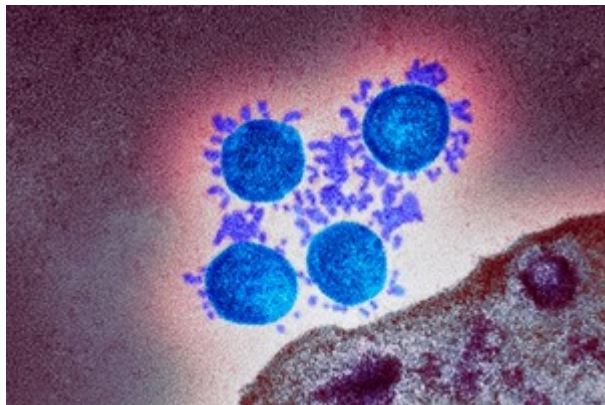


Rapid evaluation confirms lateral flow devices effective in detecting new COVID-19 variant



Scientists at PHE's Porton Down laboratory have carried out a [rapid evaluation](#) using clinical and laboratory grown samples containing the VUI 202012/01 variant to test whether it can be detected by lateral flow devices (LFDs) currently in use across the country.

Five LFDs were tested. Each device is either in use as part of mass testing or going through the final stages of validation at PHE. Each device successfully detected samples containing the new variant.

LFDs are one of the new tools being used to help detect COVID-19 and results can be delivered rapidly in under 30 minutes.

The devices can identify people who have high levels of virus but who do not have symptoms and would not otherwise be coming forward for a test. This is important as up to 1 in 3 people who have coronavirus never show any symptoms but may still be infectious.

Whereas the new variant affects the spike protein on the surface of the virus, the lateral flow devices tested work by detecting the nucleocapsid protein that is located inside the virus, which is less likely to be affected.

Dr Susan Hopkins, Senior Medical Advisor to PHE and NHS Test and Trace, said:

This rapid evaluation confirms that lateral flow devices can detect the new variant. This is good news as it means they can continue to be used to find people who have COVID-19 without symptoms who might be unknowingly passing it on.

Lateral flow devices alone aren't a silver bullet for stopping the spread of the virus but we know they can help detect large numbers of positive cases quickly.

When used in combination with other infection prevention control measures, they are another vital tool to help us combat the spread of the virus.

Labs have been issued with guidance to ensure that PCR tests can detect this variant.

DHSC has not identified any issues with detection of the variant in its network of laboratories.

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