

**SAGE ADVICE**JANUARY 2020**SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT DECISIONS**

On 22 January, SAGE noted that there was no evidence yet on whether individuals are infectious before showing symptoms.

On 28 January, SAGE noted that the sensitivity of tests was unclear, particularly in early phases of illness or when symptoms

- are mild. Hence, they advised that it would not be useful to test asymptomatic individuals, as a negative test result could not be interpreted with certainty. SAGE also noted that there was limited evidence of asymptomatic transmission, but early
- indications imply some is occurring.

## FEBRUARY 2020

- On 4 February, SAGE noted asymptomatic transmission cannot be ruled out and transmission from mildly symptomatic individuals is likely. They also discussed different international approaches to testing, including swabbing asymptomatic individuals returning from China. At the time, they noted that diagnostic capacity is limited, but is growing.
- On 11 February, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) met with Directors of Public Health to encourage each Health Board to look at sampling in community settings to minimise the number of people attending hospital settings.
- On 13 February, CMO issued a letter to all Health Boards updating geographical and clinical case definition and arrangements for testing, as well as to ensure timely assessment and testing where possible within 24 hours.

## MARCH 2020

- On 16 March, SAGE noted that antibody testing is particularly vital to address the central unknown question of the ratio of asymptomatic to symptomatic cases.
- Work to increase testing capacity in Scotland continues, by 18 March, testing capacity at Edinburgh, Glasgow and Dundee combined is 780 tests/day.
- On 23 March 2020, the Scottish Government issued guidance for NHS Boards on using the available testing capacity to support essential NHS and Social Care services, by testing symptomatic staff or symptomatic household members.
- At the beginning of April, the [Infection Prevention and Control \(IPC\) guidance](#) was updated to recommend that all health and social care staff to be risk assessed for their use of PPE, including masks, regardless of whether they were caring for patients who were suspected of having COVID-19. This reflected the sustained transmission of COVID-19 in the community.

## APRIL 2020

- On 14 April, SAGE considered a [paper on the use of masks produced by NERVTAG](#) and asked for a [shorter paper on options](#) to be produced for the next SAGE meeting.
- On 16 April, SAGE noted that it is a policy decision as to whether to use masks in some contexts and agreed to produce revised advice on masks in the week commencing 20 April.
- On 21 April, SAGE concluded that on balance there is evidence to recommend the use of cloth masks in certain higher-risk settings as a precautionary measure.
- On 23 April, the Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group discussed a paper on asymptomatic cases, which identified studies where findings indicated asymptomatic infection rates ranging from 13% to 51%. The paper noted that asymptomatic cases were as likely as symptomatic cases to transmit infection, but that more research was needed.
- On 30 April, SAGE noted a recent NHS study suggested a positive test rate among asymptomatic healthcare workers of 5-6%.
- On 22 April, The Scottish Government started testing everyone admitted to a care home.
- On 28 April, the Scottish Government published guidance on the use of face coverings by the general public (updated guidance can be found [here](#)), based on the scientific and medical advice.
- On 29 April, we started testing all over 70s admitted to hospital, recognising that the elderly can have atypical symptoms.
- On 1 May, the Scottish Government started testing all residents and staff in care homes where there are one or more cases.

## MAY 2020

- On 1 May, SAGE noted that there is uncertainty around the potential for transmission symptom onset: if this is significant (which they believed it was), this has implications for contact tracing.
- On 5 May, SAGE noted that more work is needed to understand transmission mechanisms, including in care homes and hospitals, and different contact situations.
- On 7 May, SAGE reiterated advice that there should be extensive testing of healthcare workers including asymptomatic workers.
- On 7 May, the Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group discussed asymptomatic healthcare workers and the risk of transmission to the wider community.
- The Scottish Government [COVID-19 Nosocomial Review Group](#) received literature on testing asymptomatic healthcare workers. The group recommended on the [meeting of 7 May 2020](#) that this should be considered.
- On 25 May 2020, we announced that we will be offering testing to all care home staff weekly.

## JUNE 2020

- On 4 June, the Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group considered potential uses for additional testing capacity, including whether contacts of known cases could be tested even if they have no symptoms, and whether random testing could be carried out within certain groups.
- On 8 June, Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, head of WHO's emerging diseases unit, said that "from the data we have, it still seems to be rare that an asymptomatic person actually transmits onward to a second individual."
- On 11 June, the Scottish Government COVID-19 Advisory Group discussed challenges with testing, such as testing capacity and the testing strategies for different groups, including the role of active case finding of asymptomatic cases. The group also noted the risk of non-compliance to self-isolation measures from those who are asymptomatic and test negative to COVID-19 but reinforced the importance of adherence to prevent further community transmission.
- On 17 August, the Scottish Government [published its testing strategy](#), which includes proactive case finding as a testing priority. That means hunting for the virus by testing close contacts and testing in outbreaks. This would be done through selected asymptomatic testing, which has the potential to suppress transmission to the lowest levels possible.
- Scotland will also participate in the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey, which will represent the single biggest expansion of asymptomatic testing for surveillance purposes to date in the pandemic, building to 15,000 individuals tested every two-week rolling period. This equates to approximately 9,000 households.