

COVID – 19 NHS Frontline Testing Kit - Distribution and Returns Delivery

Background and Context

Following a call, the Cabinet Office held with a series of on-line retailers and logistics companies including Royal Mail in recent days, Royal Mail has agreed to support the distribution and returns delivery of COVID -19 test kits for Key Workers. There are two types of test kits which will be rolled out. The first phase will be a virus test kits for Frontline NHS workers and will comprise both an outbound delivery and inbound delivery returns service. This will then be followed by second phase delivering Immune test kits that are performed at home. **The immediate priority is the first phase.**

Working in partnership with Government and the Chief Medical Officer

The health of our colleagues is our **first priority**. Royal Mail has worked in partnership with the Chief Medical Officer to ensure that the process is safe for our colleagues. Throughout the operational process colleagues are reminded to observe strict handwashing guidelines before and after handling mail.

The Chief Medical Officer has consulted with a panel of experts on the safe transport of the completed COVID-19 test kits. The following steps have been put in place to prevent any cross-contamination:

- NHS workers will be required to wash their hands immediately before and after sample collection, and again before packaging
- They should also wipe the external packaging with a disinfectant wipe
- The return packaging that will be used for the completed test kits complies with WHO Category B packaging requirements for the safe transport of infectious viruses

Phase 1 - Virus Testing Kit Ramp Up

Following an initial launch in wk1 @ c300 testing kits per day, volumes will steadily rise to c60k per day by mid-May 20

As volumes grow the number of laboratories the completed test kits will be returned to will increase. From launch the first laboratory is in Northern Ireland with further labs c3 set to open up in the UK mainland.

Product Use

All returned test kits will be posted via the Royal Mail T24 Returns Service. This is the same product we currently provide to the NHS. This includes blood samples and the national bowel screening in Scotland, England and Wales

The Operational Process (please see annex A fig 1 for operational schematic)

Throughout the operational process there has been a particular focus on the safety aspects and risk to Royal Mail frontline colleagues. Concerns raised by Health and Safety Officers have been actioned and a concurred SAC1 document produced. Specific operational briefs and procedures have been produced to support the collection, processing and delivery of COVID-19 test kits

Collection - Completed test kits will be placed in WHO Category B packaging **labelled UN3373 (see annex A fig 2)** and then posted into 1 of 13000 priority posting boxes before 12:00hrs Monday-Friday.

These boxes are located at Delivery Offices, Parcel Posting Box or near by / outside a POL branch. Upon opening the post box frontline colleagues will look to see if there are any test kits inside (clearly identified by the packaging and labelling). If an item(s) is identified the process for handling these items is to use a clear sealable poly bag which is inverted over the hand before picking up the test kit. NB: These sealable poly bags have been specifically provided to collection staff for additional protection and to prevent them from touching the package directly.

Once the test kit has been picked up the bag is turned right side out before sealing the test kit in the bag using the self-adhesive envelope flap (see annex A fig 3) The now securely bagged test kit is placed into a separate mail bag or tray for onward conveyance to the collection hub.

Upon arrival at the collection hub the test items are consolidated into trays / bags and taken to the Outward MC for processing.

NB: All collection colleagues are reminded to wash their hands before and after completing their collection duties

Outward Processing – Upon arrival at the outward MC the discretely bagged / trayed test items are treated as a high priority and moved straight to the Tracked 24 area for manual processing. Each item is scanned by PDA before being placed into a direct despatch bag and York cage. In the event a test kit has bypassed the collection process above and arrives in separate bag at the outward MC colleagues are instructed to follow the same handling procedures as collection staff and use a sealable poly bag that are provided for that purpose. Likewise, if a test kit is found at the point of being inadvertently inducted into the mechanisation process instruction has been provided to extract the item and take it to the designated processing area for these test kits.

Specific bag labels and York cage cards have been produced for this service (**see annex A fig 4**). At due despatch bags / Yorks are moved forward for network conveyance to Northern Ireland MC (initially) by the air network. Due to the high priority and urgent nature of these test kits Royal Mail has secured a dedicated Unit Load Device for flights going to Belfast Airport.

Inward Processing and Delivery – Upon arrival at the Inward MC receipts of test kits are moved to a dedicated area for next stage processing. Whilst these items are T24 Returns only a 'Delivery' scan is performed at this stage. Once the scan has been carried out the test kits are placed in sleeved Yorks. At specific times and to ensure a smooth flow of test kits into the Testing Laboratory, full York cages will be despatched and delivered to the customer.

Timescales

The current timescale for launch of the Covid-19 Test Kit service is as follows:

Outbound Posting RM and Amazon – 1st April 20

Inbound Returns Appearing in Post Boxes – 2nd April 20

Outward Processing – 2nd April 20

Inward Processing – 3rd April 20

Delivery to Laboratory– 3rd April 20

Annex A

Fig 1 COVID-19 Network - Operational Schematic

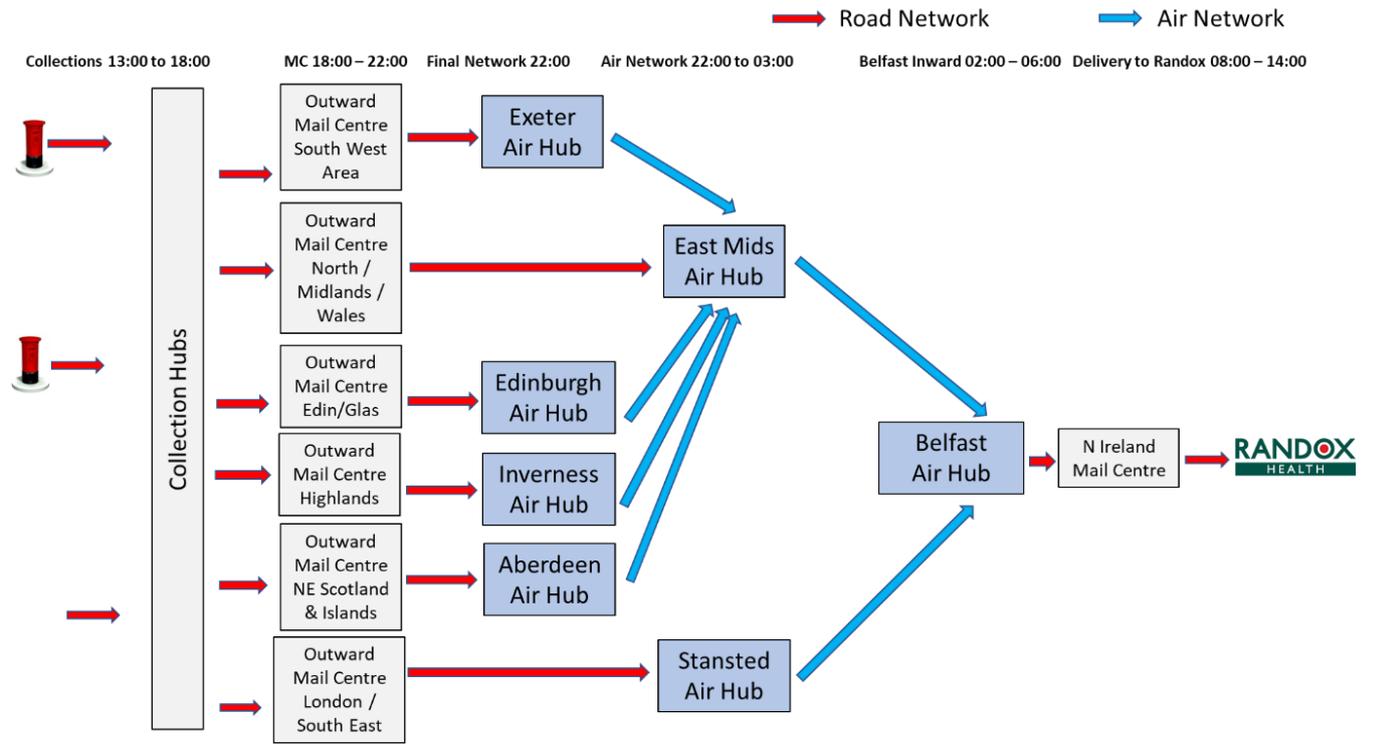


Fig 2 – Inbound Test Kit



Fig 3 Picking Up Test Kit and Sealing in Bag (illustrative purposes)



Fig 4 Outward Bag / York Labels

