

2020.06.30

4 Deputy T. Pointon of St. John of the Minister and Health and Social Services regarding the testing of people who experienced mild Covid symptoms in the early stages of the Coronavirus pandemic: (OQ.172/2020)

Will people who experienced mild COVID symptoms early on in the pandemic be invited to undergo antibody testing with a view to establishing a better understanding of the potential levels of immunity now established in the Island's community?

Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

The Government is pursuing a suppress, contain and shield strategy to ensure the continued control of the virus in a safe and sustainable way that protects Islanders by causing the least overall harm. During the last few months as part of the contain element of the strategy a range of new testing infrastructure has been introduced, which has enabled hundreds of people a week to be tested. At present we are analysing the results of these different testing programmes. During July I will be bringing forward further details describing the next phase of the testing programme. I can reassure the Deputy that a key element will be to focus on testing to continue to improve our local understanding and provide new data on current prevalence of the virus and previous exposure. It is important however to remember that currently scientific research does not support evidence of antibodies as equivalent to having immunity to COVID-19. S.T.A.C. (Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee) continue to review published national evidence on a weekly basis and I will ask S.T.A.C. to consider the Deputy's question.

4.4.1 The Deputy of St. John:

How many antibody testing kits are there now in the Island and those still on order? Will it be possible to roll out antibody testing to all Island residents who wish to be tested in the course of time?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I understand the Island received 100,000 antibody testing kits so there is a good supply in the Island and we have those contacts should more ever be needed. I do not believe there is a plan at present to test everybody in the Island. That may change as the situation moves on. But this, as I have said, is constantly under review by S.T.A.C.

4.4.2 Deputy J.H. Perchard of St. Saviour:

The Minister stated that the results of an antibodies test does not necessarily indicate immunity. If that is so, what is the purpose of an antibodies test and what does it tell us?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

The purpose is not to arrive at a diagnosis of COVID within any individual person being tested. They are being used for statistical purposes to understand the spread of the virus within our community.

4.4.3 Deputy J.H. Perchard:

The Minister stated that they are being used as a statistical measure to understand the spread in the community. What is the benefit of understanding the spread in the community and what will happen ... does he have plans if that spread reaches certain numbers?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think to calibrate our response to COVID it is important to gain an understanding of how the disease spreads. For example, by conducting the statistical survey we can pick up whether there is spread within particular geographic areas or spread within vocations because we have also tested people who have been working during the lockdown period. Therefore we can understand what are the vectors that may spread the disease and this can only help our efforts to keep the virus under control.

4.4.4 The Deputy of St. John:

Would the Minister agree that if we did better understand how prevalent immunity is in our society it might be possible to limit restrictions to those who have not developed immunity should there be a second wave of infection?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Yes, that might be possible and I am sure S.T.A.C. would have that in mind. As I have said, during July, following further work by S.T.A.C., we will be entering into the next phase of the testing programme and I have undertaken to draw the Deputy's views to the attention of S.T.A.C.