European Commission - Press release

Coronavirus: Commission steps up actions on testing with a recommendation on rapid antigen tests and support to increase testing capacity

Brussels, 18 November 2020

Today, the European Commission adopted a recommendation on the use of rapid antigen tests for the diagnosis of COVID-19. This follows the Commission's recommendation on 28 October to ensure a common approach and more efficient testing strategies across the EU. It builds on the guidance developed with Member States input and expert advice from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

The recommendation provides guidance on how to select rapid antigen tests, when they are appropriate and who should perform them. It also calls for validation and mutual recognition of tests and their results. This comes ahead of the European Leaders' virtual meeting on 19 November on the EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic, following the 29 October European Council, where it was agreed to coordinate more on testing methods.

The Commission has also signed an agreement with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) contributing €35.5 million, financed by the Emergency Support Instrument (ESI), to scale up COVID-19 testing capacity in the EU. The funding will be used to support training of staff for sampling collection and analysis and performance of tests, especially via mobile equipment.

Stella **Kyriakides,** Commissioner for Health and Food safety said: *"Testing tells us what the extent of the spread is, where it is, and how it develops. It is a decisive tool to slow down the spread of COVID-19. To increase EU coordination on testing methods, we are today providing guidance to Member States on the use of rapid antigen test to better manage COVID-19 outbreaks. Being efficient on testing also requires having the necessary resources, which is why we are also today stepping up our support to increase Member States testing capacity. Support and solidarity is key to overcome this pandemic."*

Today's recommendation provides guidance to Member States on the use of rapid antigen tests to detect the virus in specific settings. These include situations where a fast identification of infected individuals supports the management of outbreaks and regular monitoring of high risk groups, such as medical personal or in nursing homes for elderly. Member States are encouraged to conduct rapid antigen tests in addition to RT-PCR tests to contain the spread of the virus, detect infections and limit isolation and quarantine measures.

Mutual recognition of test results is of utmost importance in order to facilitate cross border movement, cross border contact tracing and treatment. Member States are strongly encouraged to mutually recognise the test results for rapid antigen tests meeting the criteria in the recommendation carried out by authorised operating testing facilities in any EU Member States. Compliance with the recommendation may then contribute to the free movement of people and the smooth functioning of the internal market in times of limited testing capacities.

Scientific and technical developments continue to evolve, offering new insights on the characteristics of the virus and the possibilities for using different methodologies and approaches for COVID-19 diagnosis. The Commission therefore remains ready to further update the recommendation on the use of tests accordingly.

To further enhance testing capacities in the EU, the Commission is funding €35.5 million to the IFRC to support training of staff and enable Red Cross Mobile Testing Teams to have access to the necessary equipment, lab items and reagents to take samples and perform tests, and support national authorities in their work.

The collaboration with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is open to the EU Member States and the UK, through the national Red Cross Society. Seven Member states have decided to participate: Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain.

Background

The pandemic has demonstrated that there is a need to improve preparedness and to manage cross-border threats more effectively at both EU and Member State level. Fast and accurate testing is key for tackling COVID-19. The Commission has supported research and development of such tests and will launch a joint procurement procedure for rapid tests. €100 million will be made available from the Emergency Support Instrument to support Member States.

For More Information

Commission Recommendation on the use of rapid antigen tests for the diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection

Commission recommendation of 28 October on COVID-19 testing strategies

Factsheet on Health Actions supported through ESI

Questions & Answers on ESI

EU Coronavirus response

Overview of the Commission's response

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