



Phlebotomy and pathology during the Covid-19 pandemic

1. For GPs and the primary care team

Phlebotomy and pathology during the Covid-19 pandemic

Background

- The safety of many medicines depends on monitoring, including blood tests
- Important, non-Covid diagnoses will be missed without access to investigations
- Many people who are shielded are likely to need a monitoring blood test at least once in a 12-week period.
- Domiciliary phlebotomy is not a risk-free form of patient contact
- Modelling suggests domiciliary phlebotomy cannot be expanded to see everyone who is shielding and needs a blood test
- Various guidelines¹ accept that people will need to come out of shield for essential medical care.

Guidance

In response, across NCL we are advocating a patient-centred approach, based on shared decision making. Only essential testing is advised, but patients who can travel safely to a 'cold' site (ie avoiding public transport) are asked to do so because the benefits of having the test are sufficiently large relative to the risk. Local patient transport solutions have been made and further details can be found [add in link to patient transport info provided in system bulletin 23/04](#)

Phlebotomy sites have been agreed to maximise infection control procedures by following a standard protocol to include:

- Appointments for phlebotomy to be booked only (no walk-in)
- Screening of incoming patients for viral symptoms takes place in advance and on arrival
- Phlebotomy sites are in separate parts of the building from areas seeing or caring for Covid or suspected Covid patients
- Patients asked to attend alone unless there are mobility or other special needs
- Social distancing is enforced
- Staff have access to PPE, with gloves and apron changed between patients

2. For patients

Having an essential blood test or other investigation

This information is for you if:

- you have been asked to 'shield' by staying at home for 12 weeks during the Covid-19 pandemic, or

¹ For example: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/20200402-FAQs-Patients-vFINAL.pdf>



- you are practising stringent social distancing because of a long term condition

The virus emergency has obviously been the priority for all of the health service, but other medical problems still need attention.

Some people taking medicines need to have regularly blood tests to make sure the medicine is not doing more harm than good. Also, health problems apart from Covid-19 are bound to develop.

So investigations – such as blood tests or X-rays – are sometimes essential to make an early diagnosis and to plan the right treatment.

If you need a blood test or other essential investigation, you may be asked to leave your shield just for this.

When this happens, great care will have been taken to make sure this is as safe as possible for you, including:

- Appointments for blood tests or x-rays will all be booked in advance, so there should be no busy waiting rooms
- Social distancing will be enforced
- Everybody attending appointments will be screened first, to make sure they do not have symptoms of the virus, and have not had contact with it
- Healthcare professionals will wear PPE, changing this between patients.

If you are unsure whether a test or other appointment is essential, please discuss this with your GP.