COVID-19 Surveillance of Asymptomatic Patients in Dental Settings

Report summarising findings August – December 2020

A Management Information release for Scotland

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About this release

This report includes analysis of twenty weeks of surveillance data collected from asymptomatic patients attending dental settings across Scotland from 3rd August 2020 to 18th December 2020. It is part of the wider programme of Enhanced Surveillance of COVID-19 in Scotland (ESoCiS).

Main points

- Nearly 8000 patients attending dental clinics across Scotland had a COVID-19 swab test when attending for dental care.
- The asymptomatic dental surveillance programme identified that, even though people who have been screened as having no symptoms of COVID-19, they can return a positive test.
- Swab COVID-19 positivity rates reflected the underlying community prevalence from 3rd August 2020 to 18th December 2020. Overall test positivity was 0.6% (95% Confidence Interval 0.4%, 0.8%)
- The results are a salient reminder to clinical staff that patients, although asymptomatic, may still harbour the virus, so ongoing adherence to good Infection Prevention Control (IPC) guidance and adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are important.
- The findings and implications are pertinent for other clinical outpatient settings.
- Dental settings are a feasible setting for population surveillance to be carried out.

Table 1: Numbers of samples, test results and percentage positive for SARS-CoV-2 per week with confidence intervals (20 weeks between 3rd August to 18th December 2020); dental settings in Scotland

Programme Week	Samples	Negative	Void	Positive	Percentage positive	Lower CI*	Upper CI*
Week 1 (3Aug-)	73	72	1	0	0.0	0.0	5.0
Week 2	110	109	1	0	0.0	0.0	3.4
Week 3	89	86	3	0	0.0	0.0	4.1
Week 4	85	85	0	0	0.0	0.0	4.3
Week 5	326	283	43	0	0.0	0.0	1.2
Week 6	343	288	55	0	0.0	0.0	1.1
Week 7	402	384	16	2	0.5	0.1	1.8
Week 8	412	405	7	0	0.0	0.0	0.9
Week 9	413	410	2	1	0.2	0.0	1.4
Week 10	441	421	13	7	1.6	0.8	3.2
Week 11	441	435	5	1	0.2	0.0	1.3
Week 12	524	509	9	6	1.1	0.5	2.5
Week 13	546	526	15	5	0.9	0.4	2.1
Week 14	614	612	1	1	0.2	0.0	0.9
Week 15	608	595	10	3	0.5	0.2	1.4
Week 16	632	620	2	10	1.6	0.9	2.9
Week 17	510	506	3	1	0.2	0.0	1.1
Week 18	431	424	4	3	0.7	0.2	2.0
Week 19	402	394	6	2	0.5	0.1	1.8
Week 20 (14Dec-)	387	381	3	3	0.8	0.3	2.3
Overall Total (Weeks 1-20)	7789	7545	199	45	0.6	0.4	0.8

Background

Following lockdown in March 2020, Urgent Dental Care Centres (UDCCs) were established across Scotland for dental emergency provision. As patients attending these UDCCs were already making an essential visit outside lockdown restrictions, it was proposed that dentistry should contribute to COVID-19 testing and surveillance. Dental teams could be trained to undertake COVID-19 swab testing and were already wearing appropriate PPE. Moreover, dental settings in Scotland had previously been shown to be a feasible source of participants, representative of the population for virus (HPV) testing.

PHS established a National Steering Group for surveillance of COVID-19 in dental settings, focussing on asymptomatic patients who had already been screened as free from symptoms prior to their dental appointment. Two NHS Boards (NHS Fife and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde) piloted the programme before it was rolled out nationally.

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Further information

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The next release of this publication TBC.

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