COVID-19 Surveillance in Dental Settings

Report summarising findings of asymptomatic programme August 2020 – April 2021

A Management Information release for Scotland

Publication date: 12 May 2021

About this release

This report summarises analysis of thirty-five weeks of surveillance data collected from asymptomatic patients and staff in dental settings across Scotland from 3rd August 2020 to 1st April 2021. It is part of the wider programme of Enhanced Surveillance of COVID-19 in Scotland (ESoCiS).

Main points

- Over 10,000 patients attending dental clinics across Scotland had a COVID-19 PCR swab test when attending for dental care. In addition, over 800 staff swabs were taken in the final eight weeks of the programme.
- 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 1st April 2021. Overall patient test positivity was 0.6% (95% Confidence Interval 0.5%, 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.
- A serology sub-study was completed involving a small number of staff and patients.
- Dental settings are a feasible setting for population surveillance to be carried out.

Table 1: Numbers of patient samples, test results and percentage positive for SARS-CoV-2 per week with confidence intervals (35 weeks from 3rd August to 1st April 2021); 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	88	85	3	0	0.0	0.0	4.2
Week 4	85	85	0	0	0.0	0.0	4.3
Week 5	326	282	44	0	0.0	0.0	1.2
Week 6	343	287	56	0	0.0	0.0	1.1
Week 7	403	384	17	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	418	16	7	1.6	0.8	3.2
Week 11	441	435	5	1	0.2	0.0	1.3
Week 12	522	507	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	633	621	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	390	384	3	3	0.8	0.3	2.2
Week 21 - break	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Week 22 - break	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Week 23 (4 Jan-)	255	248	5	2	0.8	0.2	2.8
Week 24	368	360	4	4	1.1	0.4	2.8
Week 25	317	310	3	4	1.3	0.5	3.2
Week 26	216	212	1	3	1.4	0.5	4.0
Week 27	216	212	2	2	0.9	0.3	3.3
Week 28	149	144	4	1	0.7	0.1	3.7
Week 29	137	135	2	0	0.0	0.0	2.7
Week 30	185	184	1	0	0.0	0.0	2.0
Week 31	180	180	0	0	0.0	0.0	2.1

Week 32	220	215	5	0	0.0	0.0	1.7
Week 33	182	181	1	0	0.0	0.0	2.1
Week 34	133	131	1	1	0.8	0.1	4.1
Week 35 (29 Mar-)	66	64	0	2	3.0	0.8	10.4
Overall Total (Weeks 1-35)	10,415	10,117	234	64	0.6	0.5	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 appointment¹. Two NHS Boards (NHS Fife and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde) piloted the programme before it was rolled out.

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Further information

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