



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

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Sir David Norgrove
Chair, UK Statistics Authority,
1 Drummond Gate,
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27 May 2020

Dear Sir David,

Thank you for your letter of 11th May setting out the importance of clear, open and transparent reporting of statistics on COVID-19 tests. I strongly support this, and more broadly the role that high-quality statistics and data play in informing public debate and driving decision making, and particularly so as we work to address the COVID-19 situation. As you know I have authorised publication of the most full and complete data about our Covid-19 response.

I welcome your positive comments about the information we publish about testing each day. This is a complex and growing programme and our approach to publishing the statistics has developed rapidly. Daily updates are presented on gov.uk across many different aspects of testing. I now want to go further, and your suggestions for improvement are in line with developments I have already set in train.

We are implementing the following:

- (i) We are today publishing a clear definition of how our target of capacity to perform 200,000 tests a day by the end of May will be measured and reported. Capacity will be measured across testing pillars 1,2,3 and 4 by asking laboratories each day to set out how many tests they can provide. We will publish today data and commentary on the measure, again on Sunday 31st May, and will repeat, initially weekly, thereafter.
- (ii) To simplify the presentation of the daily figures on tests and to make the figures easier to find, we are reducing the volume of detailed technical comment each day but will complement this with a detailed note on methods that will also detail any revisions or updates to the figures. This will explain the various strands of testing and will also set out how each strand is counted and reported.
- (iii) Today we are also publishing a time-series of data, with more detail than our current daily totals, setting out clearly how this has grown over time and making it clear when new strands of testing were added in.

It is not straightforward to provide a definitive geographical breakdown of these figures, but I want to ensure we provide as much detail as possible for those using the statistics and we will continue to develop that analysis. Further, we are reconciling our approach to reporting across the different testing pillars to ensure consistency, and I have asked the Chief Statistician at the Department of Health and Social Care to continue working with you to ensure we provide the best information about COVID-19 testing.

I believe these steps will help to embed the principles of trust, quality and value set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. I think it is important to demonstrate how good, high quality data can be used to drive forward our response to this virus, and to build confidence and trust in our figures as we do so.

As you noted in your letter, COVID-19 measurements will need to evolve to ensure they remain meaningful as we move into new phases for tackling the pandemic. As you will be aware the Test and Trace Programme has recently been established under the leadership of Baroness Dido Harding. The programme is committed to being as transparent as possible about its work. Baroness Harding is keen to engage with you on how we ensure the right statistical reporting of the Test and Trace programme as it develops, and I am copying her into this letter.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

MATT HANCOCK