Thursday, 26 March 2020

32 test positive for COVID-19 to date

Following a five-day delay, the latest tests for coronavirus (COVID-19) were received in the Island this morning. A total of 671 people have been tested to date: 32 have now tested positive, while 472 have tested negative and 167 are still awaiting results.

The delay in receiving the results was due to the volume of tests being requested in the UK. The Government expects to be able to publish results regularly, although the intervals may be variable due to the high demand on test centres in England.

This rise in positive results corresponds with the Deputy Medical Officer of Health, Dr Ivan Muscat’s, projection for Jersey. His projection is based on the curve we are likely to see while applying social distancing.

Nevertheless, the virus has started to spread within the community and so the medical advice from the Government is that from midnight tonight all Islanders aged 65 and over, and people with underlying medical conditions, must self-isolate (as outlined in the guidance) to shield them from the spread of the Coronavirus.

The advice is in line with the Government’s approach to contain the virus where possible, delay its spread and shield the most vulnerable groups.

The Minister for Health, Deputy Richard Renouf, said: “I wish to reassure Islanders that the overall test results are published as soon as they are available. We have a duty to keep Islanders informed and we will continue to do so.

“We understand that it is reassuring to have a daily update on the figures at this uncertain time, but we cannot guarantee this because, like England, we are simply not receiving them as frequently, due to the high demand. Therefore, we are taking a sensible approach to deal with this matter as there are only a very few laboratories that can offer the kind of highly-specialised testing we need.

“We hope to have the technology on-Island in the next few weeks to perform these tests ourselves and will keep Islanders more regularly updated.

“We are introducing new measures from midnight tonight to protect our most vulnerable groups of Islanders from the spread of Coronavirus, because the medical advice is that they are more likely to suffer from more severe symptoms, be hospitalised and require intensive care. They are also at the greatest risk of death.

“By self-isolating, with the support of family, friends and the help of volunteers, we hope to shield over-65s, and those with underlying medical conditions, from the virus.
This will help save lives, by significantly reducing hospital demand throughout the infection curve."

Islanders are reminded to visit gov.je/coronavirus for the latest updates in Jersey, and to call the helpline on (01534) 445566 if they show symptoms.

- ends -

Notes to Editors

1. For further information, please contact the press office on 01534 440430 or pressoffice@gov.je

2. We are making advice for two separate groups; the over 65s and those with 'less severe' medical conditions who need to adhere to a form of strict social distancing; and those with medical conditions that put them at ‘severe risk’ who are now advised to ‘home isolate’.

3. From midnight Islanders aged 65 and over, and people with 'less severe' underlying medical conditions, should only leave their homes for a total of two hours per day and in the following limited circumstances:

   • to shop for necessities, such as food and medicine, which must be as infrequently as possible
   • for daily exercise. This can include walking, cycling, running, sea swimming or other open sea activities, provided you maintain social distancing from everyone else
   • for medical reasons, if you are advised to do so by a healthcare worker or required to do so having called 999.

   **‘Less severe’ medical conditions:**
   • Less severe respiratory conditions
   • chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
   • chronic kidney disease, such as kidney failure
   • chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
   • chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s disease, motor neuron disease, stroke, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
   • diabetes type 1 or type 2 requiring insulin or oral hypoglycaemic drugs or diet-controlled
   • problems with your spleen, for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
   • being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
   • those who are pregnant

4. Those with medical conditions that put them at ‘severe risk’ from COVID-19 are now advised to ‘home isolate’. This includes Islanders with certain cancers, severe respiratory conditions such as severe asthma, those on medications that significantly
affect their immune system, and pregnant women with underlying heart disease. These groups are advised to:

- Strictly avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough.
- Do not leave your house.
- Do not attend any gatherings. This includes gatherings of friends and families in private spaces for example family homes, weddings and religious services.
- Do not go out for shopping, work, leisure or travel
- When arranging food or medication deliveries, these should be left at the door to minimise contact.
- People in home isolation should keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.

‘Severe risk’ medical conditions are:
- Solid organ transplant recipients
- People with specific cancers:
  - people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
  - people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
  - people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
  - people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
  - people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD.
- People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
- Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.