

13 December 2021

## PCR Tests

### Request

- 1) what percentage of Northern Ireland PCR tests are ct 34 or below
- 2) what percentage of NI PCR tests are above ct 34
- 3) How many Northern Ireland PCR tests are ct 34 or below (in numbers)
- 4) How many NI PCR tests are above ct 34 (in numbers)
  
- 5) How many Northern Ireland PCR tests are ct 34 or below are false positives
- 6) How many Northern Ireland PCR tests above ct 34 are false positives
- 7) How many Northern Ireland PCR tests are ct 34 or below are false negatives
- 8) How many Northern Ireland PCR tests above ct 34 are false negatives
  
- 9) Why are only the PCR tests ct 34 or below undergo variant of concern testing?
- 10) Is it possible that PCR tests interpret other coronaviruses, such as the common cold, or the flu, as COVID and therefore yield a false positive?
- 11) When a person receives a positive PCR test result, is it possible for them to find out which variant they have?
- 12) If yes to question 11, how can a person find out what variant they have?
  
- 13) If no to question 11, why is the variant information not released to each person upon their request.
- 14) Is the Delta variant less lethal to people than the Alpha variant?
- 15) Which is the most lethal variant?

### Response

For questions 1-8, requesting NI-wide figures, you should re-direct to the Public Health Agency (PHE) who would be best placed to provide a regional response as we only hold Belfast Trust data.

#### **9) Why are only the PCR tests ct 34 or below undergo variant of concern testing?**

Sequencing requires higher viral loads to ensure adequate coverage of the viral genome

#### **10) Is it possible that PCR tests interpret other coronaviruses, such as the common cold, or the flu, as COVID and therefore yield a false positive?**

No, the SARS-COV-2 assays in use are specific for SARS-COV-2

#### **11) When a person receives a positive PCR test result, is it possible for them to find out which variant they have?**

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No, for two reasons. Firstly not all PCR positives are sequenced. UK advice re. selection of positive samples for public health response sequencing is issued by the UKHSA. Queries about sample selection should be addressed to them. Secondly, datasets for sequenced samples are anonymised before upload to the national COVID-CLIMB system.

**12) If yes to question 11, how can a person find out what variant they have?**

Not applicable.

**13) If no to question 11, why is the variant information not released to each person upon their request.**

As above.

**14) Is the Delta variant less lethal to people than the Alpha variant?**

Please refer to publically available Office for National Statistics data and PHE releases on SARS-COV-2 variant monitoring, online and freely available to the public.

**15) Which is the most lethal variant?**

As above.