**Testing for Fieldwork – from April 2022**

**1. Introduction**

Thank you for the extraordinary efforts that you have made to ensure University Field Trips have been able to go ahead safely throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic. We understand the importance and value students place on these activities as part of their courses and appreciate how you have navigated the restrictions to enable many field trips to go ahead.

As we move towards the new phase of Living with Covid, as set out by the Government and UKHSA there are a number of changes to testing nationally and we understand that the reduction of restrictions can cause some anxiety given the way in which testing mechanisms have supported the delivery of fieldwork activities during earlier phases of the pandemic.

The Government’s free mass testing programme will end on Friday 1 April. From this date, only the most vulnerable, and those who need to test in order to comply with setting or situation requirements, will be able to access free tests.

We await a Government announcement on which groups will be able to access free Government testing. Those in these eligible groups will be able to collect test kits according to Government instructions.

This means that, under this revised government guidance and in line with latest Public Health advice, for the majority of our community, PCR and LFD testing on our campuses will no longer be available. Importantly this means that for the majority of people, there will be no action to take if a person has COVID symptoms - there will be no requirement to test or self-isolate. For those who feel unwell, the advice will be to stay at home.

Following advice from Public Health, LFD and PCR testing will continue to be available in a small number of targeted areas. Staff and students in these categories will still be able to access testing on our campuses for the immediate future.

This includes fieldwork trips where:

1. There is an outbound requirement to prove the absence of COVID 19 in order to enter a country
2. There is a legal requirement in place at the destination to continue with LFD testing regularly for the duration of the trip
3. Someone involved in the trip is vulnerable to COVID (using government definition) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-people-whose-immune-system-means-they-are-at-higher-risk>

**2. Fieldtrip Risk Assessment**

Prevention of COVID transmission should be the key factor in field trip arrangements and a default position of good practice. Fieldwork leads should consider mitigation in the risk assessment, focussed on prevention of infection and spread of infection.

**Considerations for your risk assessment**

Prior to the trip

* Encourage the reduction of risks of transmission as far as possible, practice good personal hygiene and wearing of face coverings

Face

* ensure face coverings are available
* If public transport or buses / car sharing recommend people wear a face covering
* Consider the activities being carried out. Do any involve people working very closely together?

Space

* Consider the journey, destination, tasks and any sleeping arrangements – can you use space to maximise the space between people?

Hands

* Can you wash hands regularly or would a stock of hand gel be useful
* Are you sharing any equipment or items?

Ventilation

* Consider how you can maximise the air flow on the journey, at the destination and in overnight accommodation

Cleaning

* Can you manage touch points by encouraging additional cleaning?

Vaccination

* The university continues to encourage staff and students to take up the full programme of vaccinations
* Spring vaccinations appointments have now opened for over 75’s and over 12’s who are vulnerable.

**3. Testing requirements**

If there is an outbound requirement to test in order to enter a country, staff and students will be required to take a test in order to travel. If they are not willing to test or follow the inbound rules; this may mean persons are not able to travel.

Several international countries no longer require a negative test result to enter the country, however if there is a COVID infection in the group during the stay, persons may be required to self isolate in accordance with local rules. You should be familiar with the local testing and isolation requirements prior to travel. FCO travel advice or advice from Embassy’s on requirements can be helpful.

International countries may require proof of vaccination to enter the country.

In the event there is a vulnerable member of the group, asymptomatic testing is not currently mandatory nor a legal requirement. However, as part of the risk assessment all those attending can be asked to participate in testing to reduce the risk of transmission.

This can only be a request to test - it must not be a requirement of attendance or participation.

Field work leads should work with partners / hosts to establish if there are any vulnerable persons at the destination who will be working closely with the fieldworkers. As part of working together to share risk assessments, the lead can identify if any others participating in the trip are vulnerable. In this instance, those on the trip can be asked to participate in testing, but this can only be a request to test – it must not be a requirement of attendance or participation.

**4. Types of tests**

* University PCR tests (HALO) can be used for outbound travel where there is a requirement to have a negative test to enter the destination country. University HTK (LFD) are not suitable for outbound travel, however, field work leads can procure suitable LFD if this is the requirement.
* HTK test kits (LFD) can be used if there is a requirement at the destination to continue with LFD testing regularly for the duration of the trip. It is important that the fieldwork lead checks what type of test is required. University HTK will be available, but may not fit the requirement and alternatives may be required. HTK kits must be kept out of direct sunlight, stored at a temperature below between 2oC and 30oC, and used at a temperature between 15oC and 30oC.
* HTK test kits (LFD) can be used if there is a local requirement to test in the presence of symptoms, test can be taken, however, there may be a specific test type that is required in this scenario, e.g. PCR. Ideally the fieldtrip lead will be able to identify if testing is needed in the presence of symptoms, while away, and if so, are there any stipulations on test type. If HTK can be used, they can be taken.
* HTK Test kits (LFD) will be available for trips where there is a vulnerable person attending and these can be used before and during the trip by those willing to participate to test twice weekly. If symptoms present during the trip, the HTK can be used. HTK kits must be kept out of direct sunlight, stored at a temperature below between 2oC and 30oC, and used at a temperature between 15oC and 30oC.

**5.0 Access to Home Test Kits**

If your field trip meets the criteria above, home test kits (HTK) can be requested for the trip. Each box contains 7 tests, enough for 2-3 weeks of asymptomatic testing per person, and should cover testing before and during field trips within this timeframe. This relates to both UK and International field trips. Please do not request more than you need as this may affect supply for others and the supply is only permitted for use in accordance with the Public Health guidance and categories outlined above.

There can only be a request that students undertake asymptomatic testing prior/ during the trip and it must not be a requirement of attendance or participation

The only test that can be mandated is one needed to meet outbound travel requirements, or in country requirements for LFD in situ.

**6.0 Testing for Travel**

University PCR tests (HALO) can be used for outbound travel where there is a requirement to have a negative test to enter the destination country. University HTK (LFD) are not suitable for outbound travel, however, field work leads can procure suitable LFD if this is the requirement.

If timeframes do not meet those required, Colleges can either work with the RRH to arrange to suit, or arrange their own testing.

Please do not book symptomatic tests for this purpose. In order to maintain infection prevention and control standards at the test centre, field trip participants can access tests when the HALO PCR testing service is not in use for symptomatic testing and this session can be arranged by Field Trip Lead with RRH (https://www.exeter.ac.uk/coronavirus/rapid-response/).

PCR testing will be available on Penryn and Streatham campuses on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Please carefully plan the testing by contacting the RRH, to ensure testing can be taken on a day that fits the timescales for travel.

Please be aware that void samples will need to be repeated and this should be factored in.

If the test for travel is positive, follow outbound rules; this may mean participants are unable to travel.

**7.0 Positive Participants - Prior to Field Trip**

From 1 April, there is no legal requirement in England that should prevent a person who has tested positive in the five days leading to a field trip from attending a trip in England. However, the University would encourage a common-sense approach to this – if the participant is poorly they should choose not to attend. If they are not unwell, infection prevention and control measures will be needed if they want to continue on the trip.

This also applies for international trips where there is no legal requirement to test on entry or self-isolate if positive.

If the field trip is arranged for a country or region where self-isolation is required for positive cases (e.g. Scotland, currently) the positive participant should not attend as they would be required to self- isolate.

**8.0 Positive Participants – During Field Trip**

If HTK is being used on the field trip and a participant tests positive during the trip the laws governing positive cases at the location of the field trip must be followed.

For example, in England, there would be no legal requirement to self-isolate or leave the field trip early, however good practice should be followed in terms of ventilation, face coverings and hand hygiene in this situation (follow your pre-planned risk assessment which will cover what you will do in this situation). The person with symptoms may wish to go home if they are not feeling well.

Due care and attention should be given to anyone who is vulnerable and work with them to agree what the plan will be in this situation.

If there are self-isolation rules for positive cases in the region these must be followed and included in risk assessment and field trip planning. The legal duty of care must be considered at this point to ensure the participant is safe and has access to essential supplies if they must self-isolate. You may also need to consider if someone needs to wait with the positive participant to travel home if their self-isolation extends beyond the end of the field trip.

It would be advised to consider how the positive participant will travel home if they wish to leave the field trip early due to ill health and this would be the responsibility of the Field Trip Lead and College. Positive cases do not have to be declared if using public transport in England. Private transport providers may have their own rules on the carriage of positive people on their services.

**9.0 Close Contacts**

In England there is no contact tracing taking place to identify close contacts and no legal requirement for close contacts to test or self isolate. You should check the requirements in your destination and plan for this.