



12 October 2018

To all London GPs

Dear colleagues

Re: Pertussis PCR testing flowchart

We are writing to you to highlight the availability of PCR testing via a throat swab for suspected cases of pertussis in all age groups and to encourage you to use this test for pertussis diagnosis.

PCR is a straightforward test, has improved sensitivity compared to culture and provides a quick turnaround diagnosis time. PCR should only be **used within the first three weeks of onset of symptoms**.

We have attached a simple pertussis testing flowchart guide regarding which test to use, how to take the test and when to take the test. It is also available as appendix 6 of the national guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pertussis-guidelines-for-public-health-management>

Summary of how to take and process a sample for a pertussis PCR test

The test is free of charge through the PHL laboratories.

For any suspected case of pertussis with onset of symptoms of less than three weeks ago, and before placing on antibiotics

- **A virology or Dry throat swab may be used to take a sample** if a Nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) or Pernasal swab (PNS) are not available.
- Please use **a Virology or Dry swab** i.e. NOT submitted in transport media, but in a sterile container
- Please submit samples to your local laboratory as per normal protocol. Samples will then be referred for Pertussis PCR detection to your local Public Health Laboratory (PHL). Pertussis PCR testing is not chargeable, when performed at a PHL. Please label clearly 'for **Bordetella pertussis PCR testing**'

Remember to notify the suspected case to your local HPT. <https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact your local HPT.

Kind regards

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