

## MedTech Europe's recommendations on testing as Europe enters the winter season

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### Executive Summary

A holistic approach to widespread respiratory testing is crucial as we enter the winter season with COVID-19 still present in general circulation. While vaccination remains the number one priority for governments to end the COVID-19 pandemic, testing is still necessary to prevent the spread of the virus and its variants and to determine if people are infected with SARS-CoV-2 with or without symptoms. Testing is also important to identify SARS-CoV-2 mutations to alert on the emergence of new variants of concern. Finally, testing is equally essential for detecting other respiratory diseases and viruses, such as the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), influenza, or pertussis. These pathogens show symptoms similar to those of COVID-19 and testing will give the possibility to distinguish them from each other. In this regard, MedTech Europe offers four recommendations to prepare for the winter season:

- **Continuous political commitment and financial support to national COVID-19 diagnostic testing strategies;**
- **Establish a COVID-19 post-vaccination immunity surveillance plan;**
- **Develop a comprehensive testing strategy that includes the diagnosis of seasonal respiratory syndromes that show similar symptoms of the COVID-19 disease;**
- **Review the European Commission Recommendations<sup>1</sup> for a common EU testing approach for COVID-19 to include recommendations to detect multiple respiratory viruses from Autumn 2021 to Spring 2022.**

### Testing helps to contain the spread of COVID-19

Diagnostic tests are playing a pivotal role in monitoring, tracking, and containing the development of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is widely recognised that frequent and widespread testing, recently coupled with high rates of vaccination against COVID-19 in Europe, has helped curb the pandemic and maintain incidence in levels that do not overburden the capacity of hospitals (especially ICUs).

This improvement has allowed countries to lower or end the strictest containment measures that characterised life before the vaccine, with social and economic activities now returning to pre-pandemic levels. Nonetheless, as we enter the winter season and with many containment measures lifted, we may risk entering a “new wave<sup>2</sup>” if vaccination campaigns and widespread testing slow down.

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<sup>1</sup> EU health preparedness: [Recommendations for a common EU testing approach for COVID-19](#)

<sup>2</sup> C. Gijs, [Belgium's fourth coronavirus wave has started, says health minister](#), POLITICO

Vaccination remains the number one priority for governments to prevent that situation. However, the vaccine alone cannot be the only solution and needs to be accompanied by widespread testing for four reasons:

- 1) While vaccination prevents the multiplication of severe cases, it does not eliminate the risk of infection or contagiousness<sup>3</sup>.
- 2) Immunity varies from a subtype of the population to another. Current studies show that it wanes over time, especially in elderly people<sup>4</sup>, leading to an increased risk of infection over time in these populations.
- 3) A substantial portion of the population (for example, people who choose not to take the vaccine and children under the age of 12) is still outside this coverage. They are more likely to spread the virus more than vaccinated people.
- 4) With a population over 18 years old fully vaccinated at 75.1% and partially at 80,2% in the EU/EEA as of 28 October 2021<sup>5</sup>, the vaccination coverage in Europe continues to improve. Still, the same cannot be claimed for other parts of the world, where the virus may continue to mutate and develop in more dangerous variants that can spread to Europe and overcome the protection offered by the vaccine.

In addition, vaccine boosters are being recommended for certain groups of people whose immune responses become less robust over time. The establishment of a plan to monitor the various components of humoral and cellular immunity of the population over a period long enough to understand the durability of those components would allow in better managing the need for booster campaigns.

## Testing for respiratory diseases

As Europe enters the winter season, a potential new wave of COVID-19 will not be the only health risk: experts predict an increased risk of influenza and other respiratory viruses compared to previous years<sup>6</sup>. This is due to the much lower immunity levels of the general population this year, explained by social distancing, high use of PPE and lockdown measures that were applied last year, that drastically prevented respiratory viruses from circulating.

Respiratory infections are typically seasonal in most parts of the world. In temperate areas of the northern hemisphere, they usually start in autumn or early winter and last approximately four to five months. In recent weeks, many European countries such as Denmark, Germany, France, or the UK have reported an upsurge in seasonal respiratory conditions such as RSV and pertussis.

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<sup>3</sup> D. Swan et al., [\*COVID-19 vaccines that reduce symptoms but do not block infection need higher coverage and faster rollout to achieve population impact\*](#), Nature

<sup>4</sup> E. Dolgin, [\*COVID vaccine immunity is waning — how much does that matter?\*](#) Nature

<sup>5</sup> ECDC, [\*COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker\*](#)

<sup>6</sup> N. Triggler, [\*Flu jab vital this winter along with Covid vaccine\*](#), BBC

Many of these respiratory diseases show symptoms that are very similar to COVID-19. That is why it is crucial to develop a comprehensive strategy that includes COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. Putting diagnostic testing at the heart of national influenza strategies would allow for the fast differential diagnosis of patients with seasonal respiratory syndromes, their efficient triage, and the implementation of the appropriate therapeutic measures.

## Recommendations

To continue monitoring the development of the COVID-19 pandemic while quickly identifying and distinguishing other respiratory pathogens and disease outbreaks as we enter the winter season, **MedTech Europe calls for:**

- **Continuous political commitment and financial support to national COVID-19 diagnostic testing strategies** to ensure the detection of cases and tracing across Europe to accompany the relaxation of barrier measures and facilitate on-time decision making by national or regional authorities.
- **Establishing a COVID-19 post-vaccination immunity surveillance plan** to measure vaccination effectiveness over time and inform potential vaccination booster campaigns.
- **Developing a comprehensive testing strategy that includes the fast differential diagnosis of seasonal respiratory syndromes that show similar symptoms of COVID-19** allowing efficient triage of patients and the implementation of appropriate therapeutic measures,
- **The review of the European Commission Recommendations for a common EU testing approach for COVID-19**, initially set out on 17 September 2020, to include recommendations to detect multiple respiratory viruses from Autumn 2021 to Spring 2022, as demands will surge for diagnosis due to the similarity of symptoms and presentation<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> See 1

## About MedTech Europe

MedTech Europe is the European trade association for the medical technology industry including diagnostics, medical devices and digital health. Our members are national, European and multinational companies as well as a network of national medical technology associations who research, develop, manufacture, distribute and supply health-related technologies, services and solutions.

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## For more information, please contact:

Jean-Noël Bouillon  
Director IVD Members Relations - Operations & Services  
MedTech Europe  
[j.bouillon@medtecheurope.org](mailto:j.bouillon@medtecheurope.org)