
FIP Holding Statement on in-pharmacy COVID-19 testing

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22 January 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has created suffering and death around the world, with unprecedented economic losses, unemployment and unsafe working conditions as well as serious harm to education, productivity and social well-being. Diagnostic testing is one of the most important aspects in controlling a pandemic. As the World Health Organization director general has highlighted, the quicker COVID-19 can be diagnosed, the quicker action can be taken to treat and isolate those with the virus and trace their contacts.¹ FIP recommends that rapid diagnostic testing is supported by trained healthcare professionals with the skills to collect the biological sample, perform the test, interpret the test result and advise on the appropriate action.

Many COVID-19 tests are available from many different manufacturers and organisations. The FIP SARS-CoV-2 Testing Working Group, assembled by the leadership of FIP, has produced guidance² on tests and counselling to assist practising pharmacists in talking to people who have questions concerning SARS-CoV-2 tests.

All around the world, community pharmacies have remained open to provide essential services to patients and the public throughout the pandemic, ensuring access to medicines and personal protective equipment, delivering medicines to patients' homes, giving evidence-based advice to their communities, producing and supplying hand sanitisers, and in several countries, contributing to screening strategies through point-of-care tests. For example, in Australia a pilot study for pharmacies' involvement in testing for COVID-19 was introduced, benefiting from community pharmacies'

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¹ WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 28 September 2020. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2XO8rD1>

² International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP). COVID-19: Evaluation of diagnostic testing methods and devices. International Pharmaceutical Federation; 2020. Available from: <https://www.fip.org/file/4871>



convenience for patients (they receive over 458 million patient visits annually).^{3,4} Similarly, in the USA, in April 2020, pharmacists were authorised by the federal government to conduct COVID-19 testing.⁵ Likewise, in the UK, Switzerland, Spain and France, pharmacies have been offering COVID-19 testing services.^{6,7,8,9}

FIP advocates that community pharmacists can play an active role in diagnostic testing by providing tests and pre- and post-test information to patients, including in cases of a potential false negative result. Community pharmacists can also help refer positive cases to public health authorities for follow up and contact tracing.

Where governments are scaling up testing across populations, FIP encourages and supports pharmacists to play a role if they are able (i.e. trained and authorised).

Many community pharmacies and pharmacists are available to provide these essential tests right now and look forward to joining efforts with other health professions using this strategy to bring the current pandemic under control. Strict preventive measures that involve limitations to individual freedoms and prolonged lockdowns have been necessary in many parts of the world. However, lockdowns are unsustainable as long-term strategies, and introducing accessible diagnostic tests via pharmacies is an important way of controlling this pandemic. FIP stresses that it is vital for all countries to expand their testing pathways by engaging pharmacists and their teams in providing additional access to testing as well as opportunities for people to be advised on testing.

Community pharmacies provide equity of access to disease prevention measures and help to ensure the highest possible quality of life and function at all stages of life. Where community pharmacists are available and able to provide COVID-19 diagnostic testing, FIP urges governments and health authorities to support them in doing so, so that quick, safe and professional mass testing is facilitated. This is both an ethical and a public health priority.

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³ Queensland Government. COVID-19 testing in pharmacies pilot. Joint statement. 2020. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3oXcmcm>

⁴ Community Pharmacy - helping provide better quality and resilient urgent care. National Health Service; 2014.

⁵ American Pharmacists Association. Authority to Test for COVID-19. APHA; 2020. Available from: <https://bit.ly/35Sk1RP>

⁶ The Pharmaceutical Journal, Vol 305, No 7939, online | DOI: 10.1211/PJ.2020.20208182

⁷ Apothekerverband des Kantons Zürich. Website; 2020. Available from: <https://bit.ly/3bJOeGC>

⁸ Catalonia will facilitate COVID-19 screening in all pharmacies from the end of January or the beginning of February 2021. Farmacia Comunitaria. 2021. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2M5xzCl>

⁹ Tests against COVID-19: 40% of pharmacies practice them, says Union of dispensary pharmacists' unions. 2021. Available from: <https://bit.ly/2LYRCCz>