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Lewis Macdonald MSP
Convenor
Health and Sport Committee

By Email

22 December 2020

Dear Lewis,

IMPROVING RURAL ACCESS TO COVID-19 TESTING: HOME TEST KITS

As you know, anyone with COVID symptoms can book a test via the UK booking portal. They can then book a test at a drive-through test site, a walk-through test site, or alternatively order a home test kit. Up until now, home test kits have not been available in some mainland locations. This is because the Royal Mail system was not able to send the kits to laboratories quickly enough.

As of 18 December, home test kit provision covers the remaining 82 mainland Scotland postcode districts that were previously excluded, which are listed in Annex A. My officials have worked with the UK Government and local partners to improve the system, namely by:

- speeding up postal services for home test kits,
- extending the post box system that can receive home test kits, 98 additional post boxes can now receive home test kits – including 63 in previously unserved areas, and,
- arranging temporary courier support for areas within NHS Highland, NHS Forth Valley and NHS Tayside where UK-wide courier provision is not yet available – including where postcode districts span two health board locations.

Anyone returning a home test kit can find the location of their closest priority post box on the Royal Mail website, and they can book a courier by following the instructions that come with the test kit. These instructions direct them to phone the national helpline. The call handler then directs them to call their health board on a specific number to have the kit collected.

Anyone who needs a test on the islands within NHS Highland territory should refer to NHS Inform or call 0800 028 2816 to find out how to book a test through local routes. The UK booking portal is only able to reference postcode districts and not full postcodes, this means that individuals in several island locations within the territory of NHS Highland can order home test kits when there is no mechanism to return them through the postal system or by courier and local testing routes should continue to be used.

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My officials and I will continue to work with the UK Government and local partners to improve access to COVID-19 testing in rural areas and the islands. I would be grateful if committee members could continue to raise issues that constituents report with the expanded provision with my office at CabSecHS@gov.scot.

JEANE FREEMAN

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ANNEX A: Table of postcode districts that can now order COVID-19 home test kits (mainland only)

Postcode district	District has activated post box*	Health Board providing courier support	Postcode district	District has activated post box*	Health Board providing courier support
FK17	Yes	NHS Forth Valley	KW1		NHS Highland
FK18		NHS Forth Valley	KW10		NHS Highland
FK19	Yes	NHS Forth Valley**	KW11		NHS Highland
FK20		NHS Forth Valley**	KW12		NHS Highland
FK21		NHS Forth Valley**	KW13		NHS Highland
IV10	Yes	NHS Highland	KW14		NHS Highland
IV11	Yes	NHS Highland	KW2		NHS Highland
IV17	Yes	NHS Highland	KW3		NHS Highland
IV18	Yes	NHS Highland	KW5		NHS Highland
IV19		NHS Highland	KW6		NHS Highland
IV20		NHS Highland	KW7		NHS Highland
IV21		NHS Highland	KW8		NHS Highland
IV22	Yes	NHS Highland	KW9		NHS Highland
IV23		NHS Highland	PA28		NHS Highland
IV24	Yes	NHS Highland	PA29	Yes	NHS Highland
IV25	Yes	NHS Highland	PA30	Yes	NHS Highland
IV26	Yes	NHS Highland	PA31	Yes	NHS Highland
IV27	Yes	NHS Highland	PA32	Yes	NHS Highland
IV28		NHS Highland	PA33		NHS Highland
IV4	Yes	NHS Highland	PA34	Yes	NHS Highland
IV40		NHS Highland	PA36		NHS Highland
IV41		NHS Highland	PA41		NHS Highland
IV42		NHS Highland	PA78		NHS Highland
IV43		NHS Highland	PA80		NHS Highland
IV44		NHS Highland	PH30		NHS Highland
IV45		NHS Highland	PH31		NHS Highland
IV46		NHS Highland	PH32	Yes	NHS Highland
IV47		NHS Highland	PH33	Yes	NHS Highland
IV48		NHS Highland	PH34		NHS Highland
IV49		NHS Highland	PH35		NHS Highland
IV51		NHS Highland	PH36	Yes	NHS Highland
IV52		NHS Highland	PH37		NHS Highland
IV53		NHS Highland	PH38		NHS Highland
IV54	Yes	NHS Highland	PH39		NHS Highland
IV55		NHS Highland	PH40		NHS Highland
IV56		NHS Highland	PH41		NHS Highland
IV6	Yes	NHS Highland	PH42		NHS Highland
IV63	Yes	NHS Highland	PH43		NHS Highland
IV8	Yes	NHS Highland	PH44		NHS Highland
IV9	Yes	NHS Highland	PH49		NHS Highland
IV99		NHS Highland	PH50	Yes	NHS Highland

* 'Yes' signifies at least one post box has been activated in the postcode district.

** Provides courier services for addresses in Tayside (FK19 & FK21) and Highland (FK20)

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