

NHS Lothian first to use PCR testing for Strep A cases

Lab teams in NHS Lothian are the first in Scotland to develop and use PCR testing to detect Group A Strep cases among patients admitted to hospital. Cases of respiratory illnesses have been increasing this winter.

Anyone who is suspected of having a Group A Strep illness is usually given antibiotics but this treatment can mean that an accurate diagnosis is more difficult and can take longer to make. PCR testing which is unaffected by antibiotics makes the diagnostic process much quicker and more accurate. This also reduces the onward infection rate.

Dr Kate Templeton, Head of Molecular Diagnostics, NHS Lothian explained, "While the ongoing impacts of COVID are still being felt across healthcare, and society more generally, a more positive outcome of the pandemic has been the wealth of research and innovation within laboratory testing and diagnostics.

"Within NHS Lothian, we are taking the experience and knowledge gained throughout the pandemic and applying that to other health conditions. The development and use of the PCR test, which had more commonly been used in response to COVID, for Group A Strep illnesses is hugely important. Not only is it providing quicker diagnosis, but it is helping to reduce

the spread of these infections and ultimately it is saving lives.”

The Lothian labs team is now processing PCR tests for suspected Group A Strep illnesses for all Health Boards across Scotland, a vitally important role, amid the ongoing surge in respiratory illness that is being seen across the country, and which is hugely impacting levels of hospital presentations and admissions.

Calum Campbell, Chief Executive, NHS Lothian said, “The NHS Lothian laboratory teams did incredible work throughout the pandemic, but they haven’t stopped there. This new development, which builds on their immense knowledge, and the investment we have made in this area, is now proving vital as Scotland’s healthcare system responds to increased and sustained levels of respiratory illnesses.

“The introduction of the PCR test will mean Scotland’s hospitals can diagnose Group A Strep illnesses more quickly, improving treatment options for patients and minimising the potential spread of infection. This innovation is proving invaluable now, but will continue to play a vital role in future years.

“I am immensely proud of the laboratory teams for their ongoing work in this area, and as they continue to support not just NHS Lothian, but Scotland’s other Health Boards throughout this particularly difficult winter.”