ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DANGEROUS PATHOGENS

COVID -19 meeting held on Friday 13th March, 11:00 – 12:00am.

Teleconference

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees

Members: Thomas Evans (Chair)
Peter Chiodini
Tiffany Hemming
Rick Holliman
Mike Jacobs
Mike Kidd
Christopher Melville
Rob Shorten
Dan Tucker
Anne Tunbridge

Invitees: Wonnet Hall (DfT)
Munmohan Malli (DfT)
Helen North (DfT)
Keith White (DfT)

Observers/Assessors were present from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Apologies received from Members: Neil Ferguson, Dilys Morgan, Gee Yen Shin.

1.0 Chairman's opening remarks, welcomes and apologies

The Chair welcomed all attendees to this urgent meeting convened to discuss the transport of suspected COVID-19 samples.

The Chair welcomed and thanked attendees from the Department for Transport (DfT) who have joined this meeting to provide expert advice on the matter.

2.0 Discussion on: "can clinical samples suspect of containing SARS-CoV-2 be transported by an alternative to courier in Category B transport"

The Chair introduced a recurring issue that has arisen due to the transport of clinical samples that potentially contain SARS-CoV-2 agent at Category B.

Clinical laboratories are currently facing difficulties with training and handling of Category B agents including the procurement of materials needed to transport them. An overall shortage of transport materials such as boxes and canisters has been felt across the UK, proving itself as a difficult operational reality of this incident. Thus, the Committee felt that any change to streamline the process and alleviate logistical and operational difficulties the diagnostic laboratories are facing would be extremely beneficial.

Drawing from this discussion the lack of outer packaging used to transport Category B agents was recognised as the most significant issue. However, it was noted by DfT colleagues that the outer packaging often used in NHS trusts is not the only packaging that can be utilised to transport Category B substances despite popular belief. The product for packaging currently widely recognised and used is the result of a manufacturer that has created easy to use pre-printed boxes and subsequently 'cornered the market'.

UN3373 is the UN number in which Category 3 dangerous goods belong to if they contain diagnostic substances. If a diagnostic substance has been classified as belonging to UN3373, then it must be packed for transport according to P650 guidelines/packing instructions 650. These guidelines outline the list of requirements for the quality and construction of this packaging, agreed with the DfT. If packaging follows this guidance and is marked appropriately any outer packaging obtained from various manufacturers can be used to transport suspect SARS-CoV-2 samples providing several alternatives to the packaging currently used and subsequently in short supply.

The importance of relaying this information back to the relevant parties across the devolved administrations was stressed by the Chair. The Committee concurred and felt that it was essential that some form of communication on P650 requirements is cascaded to Trusts and clinical laboratories that they can then interpret at the local level.

The Chair also put forward a question to the committee regarding the safety of transport of suspect SARS-CoV-2 samples though pneumatic air tube systems in a hospital co-located with a diagnostic laboratory. As these samples are not carried on the road, regulations for carriage of dangerous goods do not apply. However, the Committee agreed that this method of transport is not safe and therefore not recommended.

Finally, DfT attendees noted they have postal capacity for communicable disease sampling that has the potential to be mirrored during this incident.

ACTION: Helen North (DfT) to provide the ACDP chair with the P650 packaging guidelines for the Chair to cascade to the appropriate parties.

ACTION: Chair to advise policy makers that samples suspect of containing SARS-CoV-2 can be transported under less stringent conditions.

3.0 Any other business

The Committee noted that they continued to receive queries regarding point-of-care (POC) testing. These queries have increased as many NHS Trusts are planning to reintroduce molecular testing. The Committee reiterated their advice that POC testing should not be carried out unless a local risk assessment has been conducted. The wording of this advice may need to be altered for clarification purposes.

Secondly, the Chair informed the Committee that he had been contacted by DHSC regarding the classification of COVID-19 as a High Consequence Infectious Disease (HCID). The Committee unanimously agreed that this infection ***should not*** be classified as a HCID.

ACTION: Member Rob Shorten to formulate risk assessment advice for point-of-care machines that should/should not be used.

ACTION: The ACDP Chair to formally write to DHSC to inform of the ACDP's position to declassify COVID-19 as a HCID.

4.0 Close

The Chair thanked everyone for attending this teleconference on short notice including colleagues from DfT who provided expert advice on the matter. The Chair also recognised everyone's ongoing hard work during this incident.