

The Royal College of Physicians (RCP) welcomes the opportunity to submit supplementary evidence to the APPG on coronavirus, which seeks to understand the UK's handling of the coronavirus outbreak.

Summary

As part of our work to track the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce, [we conducted a survey](#) on our members and fellows on 21-22 September. The survey revealed that most doctors at work generally feel prepared during this second wave and can access the tests they need. But several challenges remain:

- **Although only 6.5% of doctors were off work for any reason, 40% of those off were self isolating** because someone in their household had symptoms and were waiting for a test.
- **80% of respondents who reported having a PCR test for COVID-19 in the past two weeks were able to access the test in the first 24 hours**, down from 88% in July.

We welcomed the launch of the [NHS COVID-19 app](#) as part of the NHS Test and Trace programme as a step in the right direction. As it is too early to fully interpret any limitations, it is crucial that user feedback is acted on as quickly as possible. Ongoing evaluation and improvement will be also be important to ensure it is fit for purpose and ultimately works in a clinical setting.

Key survey findings

The RCP is clear that we are now in the second wave of infection and our survey results confirm that. Over half of respondents (53%) said COVID-19 admissions had increased in their hospital over the past two weeks. 24% said the numbers had not changed.

Access to testing for health and social care staff

- At least 20% of doctors have had COVID-19. Antibodies were not detectable in 12% of cases.
- Only 6.5% of respondents were taking time off from their usual work schedule. But 40% of those were self-isolating because someone in their household had symptoms and was waiting for a test. As highlighted by the RCP president Professor Andrew Goddard, this is particularly concerning because it could lead to 'hundreds of doctors unavailable to provide care. And as the infection rate rises, the need for tests will rise, and a large proportion of the workforce could be out of action simply for want of a test.'
- Only 80% of respondents who reported having a PCR test for COVID-19 in the past two weeks were able to access the test in the first 24 hours, compared to 88% in July. Although results appear to be being returned sooner than in July, the government must ensure that rapid testing and results are available for health and social care staff during this second wave, particularly as we head towards a potentially challenging winter.

Preparedness for a second wave

- 65% have had a formal risk assessment, up from 56% in our last survey. The UK government must develop a plan to ensure staff are able to access a risk assessment framework and be deployed appropriately. It is crucial that employers receive continued support to [prioritise risk assessments](#), particularly for those who are vulnerable and at higher risk – black, Asian and minority ethnic health and care staff.
- 47% have been involved in a conversation in their organisation about preparing for a second wave, up from 36% in July. Given the high degree of uncertainty over how the pandemic will play out this winter, clear and timely communication of plans and guidance with clinical and managerial NHS staff is crucial
- 56% felt their organisation would have the necessary PPE, but 35% were unsure
- Only 8.5% of respondents reported having had the flu vaccine, but 86% said they planned to

Contact information: Nikita Vaghjiani, public affairs adviser – nikita.vaghjiani@rcplondon.ac.uk