20th March 2020

Dear participant,

UK NEQAS Haematology services during the Covid-19 emergency

UK NEQAS Haematology is aware that the worsening Covid-19 pandemic is placing huge pressures on health services throughout the world, including our participating laboratories. In line with other UK NEQAS centres, UK NEQAS Haematology has developed a business continuity plan with the objective of maintaining services, supporting participants and minimising the risk to our staff during this challenging period.

We anticipate that we will supply a full range of services during this time, although this is subject to review and change as the situation evolves. In the event of a failure in our supply chain, our action will be to reduce or delay the supply of services until later in the year; however, we plan to fulfil the full range of service during the coming participation year.

We understand that participants may not be able to return results by the stated closing date for surveys during this period. We ask that you store the specimens as described in the instruction sheets and, as far as possible, test material by the closing date so that it is tested in the best and most stable condition, even if you are unable to submit your results.

We wish to avoid penalising any participant for circumstances beyond their control and will be able to offer the following flexibility in the return of results. The flexibility in closing dates varies by programme, depending on the nature of the assay material and the turnaround time on reports:

1. **FBC programme**
   Specimens are stable for up to one week after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

2. **ADLC and NRBC programmes**
   Specimens are stable until the expiry date printed on the vials. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

3. **Reticulocyte count programme**
   Specimens should be analysed no more than 4 days after the closing date, i.e. test by the Friday after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

4. **ESR (including ESX) programme**
   Specimens are stable until the expiry date printed on the vials. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

5. **Hb only programme**
   Specimens may be tested up to one day after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.
   Specimens are stable. Results will be accepted without penalty up to 2 weeks after the closing date.

7. **Rapid Diagnostic Test for Malaria**  
   Specimens are stable until reconstituted. Results will be accepted without penalty up to 2 weeks after the closing date.

8. **Abnormal Haemoglobins (Sickle screen, Abnormal Haemoglobins and Liquid Newborn testing) programme**  
   Specimens may be tested up to one day after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

9. **Newborn Sickle Screening (using Dried Blood Spots) programme**  
   Specimens are stable. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

10. **Red Cell Enzymes (G6PD) screening and assay programme**  
    Specimens may be tested up to one day after the closing date. Results will be accepted without penalty up to one week after the closing date.

11. **DNA Diagnostics for Haemoglobinopathies programme**  
    Specimens are stable. Results will be accepted without penalty up to two weeks after the closing date.

12. **Digital Morphology programme**  
    The cases will open and close to schedule.

If you are unable to return any results, even with the extension to the submission dates, you can avoid a non-participation penalty by submitting a ‘blank’ return, i.e. one without any data but with the reason in the general comments box.

The delay to the receipt of a proportion of results and possible staff shortages in our team may mean that data processing and reporting is delayed beyond the published report dates. If a report is likely to be more than two weeks late, we will issue an interim analysis so that participants can assess their performance. We will follow up analytical performance concerns as soon as they become apparent.

We ask that you support our staff by keeping queries to the minimum and contact us by email rather than telephone.

Thank you to all our healthcare colleagues for the astounding work you are doing.

Keep safe.

With best regards,

Barbara De la Salle, PhD  
Director, UK NEQAS Haematology