

26 April 2021

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is right to raise concerns about lateral flow tests and the false reassurance they may provide to those who receive a negative result ([UK health regulator concerned over use of rapid coronavirus tests](#), 25 April).

There has been no sustained effort to try and find out what percentage of negative lateral flow results show up as positive on a PCR test in school children, or when used at home for mass testing. This uncertainty will be exacerbated as more people start to use them, as they have been encouraged to twice a week. Current evidence suggests that lateral flow tests miss too many infected cases to be used to rule out infection, which limits their usefulness as tests to enable or release.

The government should urgently gather more evidence on their accuracy in context of use, by carrying out evaluations using double testing with lateral flow and PCR tests. They should also be clear in their communications about what is known about the tests' effectiveness, and how positive and negative lateral flow results should be interpreted. A strong, well-articulated evidence base is an essential prerequisite for an effective testing regime.

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On behalf of the Royal Statistical Society Covid-19 Task Force

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