



Elin Jones MS
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Dear Elin

I am writing to you about the record of proceedings on 30 November and my response to a question from Rhun ap Iorwerth MS following my statement update on Covid-19. The question asked for “confirmation that the laboratories doing the bulk of the testing work in Wales can identify this new variant so that we are informed at an early stage of the situation here?”

My response referenced “some laboratories in the UK can't yet identify the new variant through PCR. So, we're just trying to ensure that we know which laboratories those are. Of course, there's a big one in Wales, and that would be in a situation where they would be able to identify it”.

This is complex and I wanted to ensure clarity is provided to Members with regard to my answer.

My reference to ‘some laboratories in the UK can't identify the new variant through the PCR test’ was in the context of laboratories that use certain platforms that identify the S-gene target when processing the PCR test sample. The new variant has mutations that can be identified through S-gene target failure that gives a good signal the sample may be Omicron. Only some laboratories within the UK network use these platforms.

Genomic analysis remains the definitive method for identification of Omicron and other variants. My reference to laboratories in Wales included NHS Wales laboratories and the IP5 lighthouse laboratory in Newport that processes the majority of Welsh samples. All positive samples from these laboratories are made available for genomic analysis and sequencing at the Public Health Wales pathogen genomics unit. Full genomic sequencing can take around 5 days to turnaround. To increase capacity for more rapid detection a further assay process for further analysis of positive samples with a turnaround of 24 hours

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

is to be deployed within NHS Wales laboratories and the IP5 laboratory. These assays are able to identify mutations present in Omicron.

Given this is a matter that requires the context to provide clarity to Members, I would be grateful if you would arrange for this explanation to be published alongside the record of proceedings.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services