



Office of the State Comptroller | 2020

The State of Israel Response to the COVID-19 Crisis
Special Interim Report

Taking Samples and Laboratory Testing for Diagnosing COVID-19

The final report will be published in 2021

Abstract

KEY FIGURES

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Number of COVID-19 testing laboratories in Israel

24,882

Average number of daily tests, Monday to Friday, from 17.7.20 to 17.8.20

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Israel's world ranking relative to 11 other countries, presented in this report, in terms of positive tests per 1,000 people, latest figures for 20.8.20

1,930,844

Number of COVID-19 tests done in Israel up to 9.8.20¹

2.1 million

Number of serological test kits² for which the Ministry of Health has not presented a plan for their use.

NIS 98m

Cost of 2.1m serological test kits for which the Ministry of Health has not presented a plan for their use.

¹ As of 6.10.20, Israel had performed 4,019,656 tests.

² Serological tests show if the subject is carrying or has carried the virus. They involve placing a normal blood sample in a special kit and sending it to a laboratory for evaluation.

Key Findings

- ❖ **Planning the number of daily tests as winter approaches:** There is a gap between Ministry of Health projections of health maintenance organizations' (HMOs) laboratory capacity and the laboratories' own actual estimates of the number of tests they can perform in the winter. The HMOs' laboratories are planning to expand their capacity by 24,000 tests daily more than the Ministry of Health plan.
- ❖ **Reagents³** - The planned scope, type and supply of reagents to various HMOs' laboratories is incompatible with the needs for their instruments.
- ❖ **Waiting time for test results:** 74% of subjects received their test results more than 36 hours after the first referral for testing, and of these 33% receive the results more than 72 hours later.
- ❖ **Serological tests:** the Ministry of Health purchased 2.4 million serological test kits at a total cost of NIS 112 million. The Audit found that the Ministry is planning to perform only 300,000 serological tests, and it has no plans for the remaining 2.1 million kits. 250 thousand kits arrived in Israel and by September 2020, but only 60,000 tests have been performed.

Key Recommendations

- ❖ **Coordination of supply of tests and reagents in the winter:** the Ministry of Health should complete its discussions with all HMOs and prepare a testing plan. This should be done in conjunction with all laboratory operators regarding the quantity and type of reagents to be supplied to them, based on the instruments at their disposal and the planned number of tests.
- ❖ **Waiting time for test results:** the Ministry of Health should collect all the figures regarding the time required for sampling and testing, so that it can identify and eliminate "bottle necks", thus making the process shorter and more efficient in order to break the infection chain.
- ❖ **Testing processes:** the Ministry of Health should examine ways of making the test process shorter and more efficient. This includes defining an expedited route for receiving referrals and using existing innovative technologies. The Ministry of Health should also remove any testing obstacles, such as long waits on the telephone to receive referrals.
- ❖ **Quality control checks for the sampling stage:** the State Comptroller's Office recommends that the Ministry of Health issue sampling guidelines to HMOs, Magen David Adom (MDA - local Red Cross chapter) laboratories and other parties

3 Chemical substances used to create chemical and bio-chemical reactions. Laboratories frequently use them for performing tests.

engaged in taking and handling test samples. These guidelines will define a standardized method for high quality sampling, not based on random checks, and analyze the causes of mistaken test results in order to limit their number.

- ❖ **Periodic tests of medical staff:** the Ministry of Health should examine the costs of COVID-19 tests for medical staff against the benefits they provide, and consider the proper frequency of testing and the most suitable types of tests.
- ❖ **Polystyrene packaging:** the Ministry of Health should check alternatives to the use of polystyrene packaging, that is environmentally unfriendly, for transporting tests, and it should consider instructing HMOs and MDA about the preferred alternative.

