Info sheet on large-scale COVID testing at the University of Bern

I. Starting point and purpose of large-scale testing

Starting on 01.05.2021, The University of Bern has offered the opportunity to have large-scale SARS-CoV2 testing prior to events in which in-person attendance is necessary. This is a supporting measure which is supplementary to the existing protection concepts. This should help to identify asymptomatic COVID-positive individuals, to interrupt chains of infection, and to increase the level of safety for in-person courses and on-site work at the University of Bern. However, testing does not allow for any easing of the applicable protection concepts.

The infrastructure, testing, and laboratory capacity now also make it possible to offer a wide range of tests as an additional measure in response to the pandemic. Such tests can be performed at the Institute for Infectious Diseases (IFIK) of the University of Bern.

II. Principles and responsibilities

The organizational units of the university submit an application to the crisis management team for approval of an event in which in-person participation over a longer period of time is necessary. These events include especially multiple-day excursions. The crisis management team also reviews these applications with regard to large-scale testing and, where necessary, orders mandatory testing as a prerequisite. Testing could also be set as a voluntary option for other events (internships, courses, laboratory work) for which no obligation is mandated. Please note that there are small differences in the procedure depending on whether a testing requirement has been issued or whether testing has been requested by the applicant.

Employees working in offices also have the option to have regular testing at this level. Organizational units can use this program to enable their employees to return from working from home. The decision of whether to conduct regular (weekly) testing lies with the managing directors.

Each institute/department which applies has an organizational co-responsibility for the implementation of the large-scale testing, which in turn also involves effort on their part.

If you have any questions about the testing process, please contact us on weekdays Monday to Friday from 09:00 - 12:00 and 13:00 - 16:00 at +41 31 631 81 11.
The following bodies and the participants have the following responsibilities in this procedure:

*Crisis management team (KS):*
- Develops the basic principles under the relevant legal, epidemiological, and operational guidelines and continuously checks their validity within the context of the changing situation.
- Reserves the right to revoke conditions, commitments, and arrangements at any time as conditions change.

*In-house physician (BA):*
- Checks on behalf of the KS whether large-scale testing is necessary for courses.
- Is available to the institute or its hotline for medical queries during operating hours (weekdays 08:00-12:15h)
- Receives any positive results from the IFIK at excursions for which testing was ordered and forwards them to the respective institute. For other events which are not excursions (e.g. laboratory internships), this takes place via the Risk Management Office (see below). This office also represents the in-house physician in his activities regarding excursions in the event of his absence.
- Informs the KS (specifically, the person in charge of in-house medical issues) about the number of positive results.

*Risk Management Office*
- Receives any positive results from the IFIK via e-mail which has been classified according to priority from events where testing is not mandatory (e.g. internships or other work which must be carried out on site) and forwards them to the event organizers. (Contact people: Urs Zehnder, Martin Schuppler)
- These contact people also represent the in-house physician in his absence for this activity during the excursions.
- Informs the KS (specifically, the person in charge of in-house medical issues) about the number of positive results

*Institute for Infectious Diseases (IFIK):*
- Provides the required number of tests and sends them with instructions to the institutes according to the procedure defined by KS (see below).
- Informs the in-house physician or the Risk Management Office by e-mail of any positive results, or if all results are negative. As standard procedure, the e-mail notification is classified according to priority and sent to massentests@unibe.ch. To ensure that the classification works smoothly, the IFIK mentions the addressee and event in the subject line (e.g. in-house physician - testing for excursion of 20.05.2021).
- Makes the laboratory report according to the requirements of the Epidemic Act (positive results within 2h, negative results within 24h).
Institute/Department:

- Ensures compliance with the protection concept during the course in consultation with the safety organization (GeSiBe, KOPAS);
- Notifies the IFIK (franziska.suter@ifik.unibe.ch), the FRM (risiko@unibe.ch), and the university transport service (transport@bt.unibe.ch) by e-mail at least three days in advance of the need or intention to perform tests with details of the event organization (name, telephone number and e-mail).
- Has defined a reasonable time frame that allows for realistic same-day sample evaluation and communication.
- Conducts mandatory testing always on the day before the event in the morning between 07:00 - 08:00 so that the samples are at IFIK on time at 09:00. Since testing is not possible on weekends or holidays, the events may only take place from Tuesday onwards. In the case of optional testing, exceptions can be made with regard to the day, taking into consideration a balance between the effort needed and the added safety gained (example: office work is possible on Mondays, even if the (regular weekly) testing only takes place on Monday). Important: so that a result is obtained on the same day, the above-mentioned times must be observed irrespective of the day of testing.
- Is responsible for the information of the participants, the ordering and execution of the test as well as the correct recording of personal data (i.e. surname, first name and date of birth on the sample tube and surname, first name, date of birth, address and telephone number on the consent form) and, with the university transport service (transport@bt.unibe.ch), organizes the delivery of the samples to the IFIK.
- Sets up a telephone hotline for the participants for the testing day
- Has an alternative plan (exclusion or postponement of their participation) for the affected participants in case sample results (for whatever reason) can no longer be communicated in a meaningful way on the testing day.
- Is responsible for the correct packaging and labeling of samples to minimize cross-contamination between samples and to comply with applicable biosafety regulations.

Participants:

- Must agree that testing will be performed and that the resulting consequences are binding. They must also confirm that they have performed the test themselves on the morning of delivery according to the instructions, and that they agree to be contacted by the institute through a non-medical person in case of a positive result (note: there is no entitlement to explicit notification in case of a negative result). For this purpose, they sign a corresponding form which is made available to the institutes.
- Are responsible for arriving on time on the morning of the test and for taking the test.
- Furthermore, they commit themselves to stay away from the event in case of a positive result and to go into isolation.
- Are available by telephone on the following day for any queries (e.g. from the contact tracing process of their canton).
- Participants admitted to the event agree to continue to comply with the usual protective measures (wearing masks, etc.) irrespective of having tested negative. Testing does NOT replace hygiene measures.
- If participants have a special exemption from wearing a mask, this must be submitted in good time (i.e. at least 2 weeks before the event) to the BA for review, including comprehensible findings (see "Info sheet on the universal obligation to wear masks at the University of Bern", in German).
III. Costs
- The University covers all direct costs (laboratory test, materials), unless these are covered by the federal government or the canton. The applying organizational units are left with the indirect costs for on-site arrangements.

IV. Further points
- If regular testing on an excursion seems appropriate, rapid antigen tests can be provided for repeat testing. A request to this effect must be submitted to the in-house physician.
- If an excursion leader wishes to make use of regular rapid tests for the excursion in question, he/she is responsible for initiating the appropriate steps in the event of a positive test result (separation of the positive person, visit to the test facility for validation via PCR, information to KAZA, etc.).

The University of Bern, 31.05.2021
Attached: Example schedule

Preliminary stage:

The institute notifies IFIK (franziska.suter@ifik.unibe.ch), the Risk Management Office (risiko@unibe.ch), and the university transport service (transport@bt.unibe.ch) at least three days prior to the need or intention to perform tests, so that the correct quantity of tests can be provided to the institute and delivered before testing day.

We recommend allowing a 10% safety margin when ordering tests. If a test becomes unusable due to improper use, individuals would still have a chance to participate.

Testing day:

07:00 - 08:00 Institute performs sampling, ensures that all samples are present and correctly labeled, and that declaration of consent forms are signed.

Transport of samples and declaration of consent forms to IFIK by transport service.

09:00 Samples arrive by courier at IFIK

16:00 Pooled results available

Option 1: If all negative -> notification to BA (in case of obligatory tests) or to the Risk Management Office (if tests not obligatory)

Option 2: if all tests positive -> retesting of the corresponding pool (and pre-information to the corresponding pool group that it is positive and consequently a breakdown/retesting will be done)

20:00 Retesting available if needed

IFIK contacts BA (in case of excursions with obligatory tests) or the Risk Management Office (in case tests are not obligatory (e.g. internships)) by mail (massentests@unibe.ch with addressee and event clearly in subject line (e.g. in-house physician - testing for excursion of 20.05.2021).

BA or Risk Management Office contacts event organizer by telephone and e-mail

21:00 Institute/Department informs positive-tested participants that they cannot participate and that isolation is necessary.