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THE HONG KONG COLLEGE
OF PATHOLOGISTS
A Constituent College of the
Hong Kong Academy of Medicine

PRESS STATEMENT

Use of Over-the-counter COVID-19 Test Kits

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The College has noticed that a variety of over-the-counter Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) self-test kits are being promoted in the market. We are concerned that the public could be misled by the results of these kits.

These over-the-counter test kits usually utilize pinprick blood samples to detect IgG or IgM antibodies against the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Antibodies are produced over days to weeks after infection; the level and timing of response vary among individuals. The performance of these kits, including sensitivity and specificity (i.e. respectively whether the test can accurately exclude COVID-19 infection and whether a positive result is reliable to indicate actual infection), also varies among assays. Thus, the public must be aware of the risk of false negative and false positive results.

A false negative result may cause a false sense of security, which could potentially increase transmission of the virus to others and result in delay in seeking medical consultation and management. On the other hand, a false positive result will lead to undue anxiety and unnecessary investigations, and even public health measures such as isolation of the person and his or her close contacts.

The College reiterates that the current test of choice for the diagnosis of active COVID-19 infection remains polymerase chain reaction (PCR)-based tests detecting viral nucleic acids. The detection of antibodies is neither a suitable nor a reliable alternative. The College urges the public to seek advice from medical professionals if COVID-19 infection is suspected.

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