

14 September 2022

To whom it may concern

Re: Continuation of surveillance spirometry testing in South Africa

The COVID pandemic continues in the form of several 'waves of infection' occurring every couple of months and it is likely to continue in this manner for some time.


The safety of lung function testing thus also varies with each wave and is to some degree dependent on the virulence and infectivity of each new variant. Given this highly variable situation the following recommendations are suggested:

Routine spirometry should continue as needed in between waves of COVID outbreaks. There are always COVID cases in the community and much is undiagnosed and so the normal stringent infection control measures should always be in place: N95 masks for spirometry technologists, adequate ventilation / negative pressure rooms and routine cleaning of equipment and appropriate use and disposal of filters etc.

Where numbers of COVID cases are increasing it would be prudent to delay any non-essential lung function to reduce risk to staff and patients. The trigger level/ number of active cases required to reduce testing is undefined and should be at the discretion of the service provider based on their risk assessment if no national guidance is provided. It is clearly evident that vaccination reduces risks of transmission and severe disease and thus all staff should be encouraged to be vaccinated and receive boosters as per National guidelines.

The risk of infection with TB, influenza and COVID-19 should never be discounted when performing lung function and infection control is paramount in all situations to protect the patient and the staff.

Yours sincerely



Prof Richard van Zyl Smit
President South African Thoracic Society