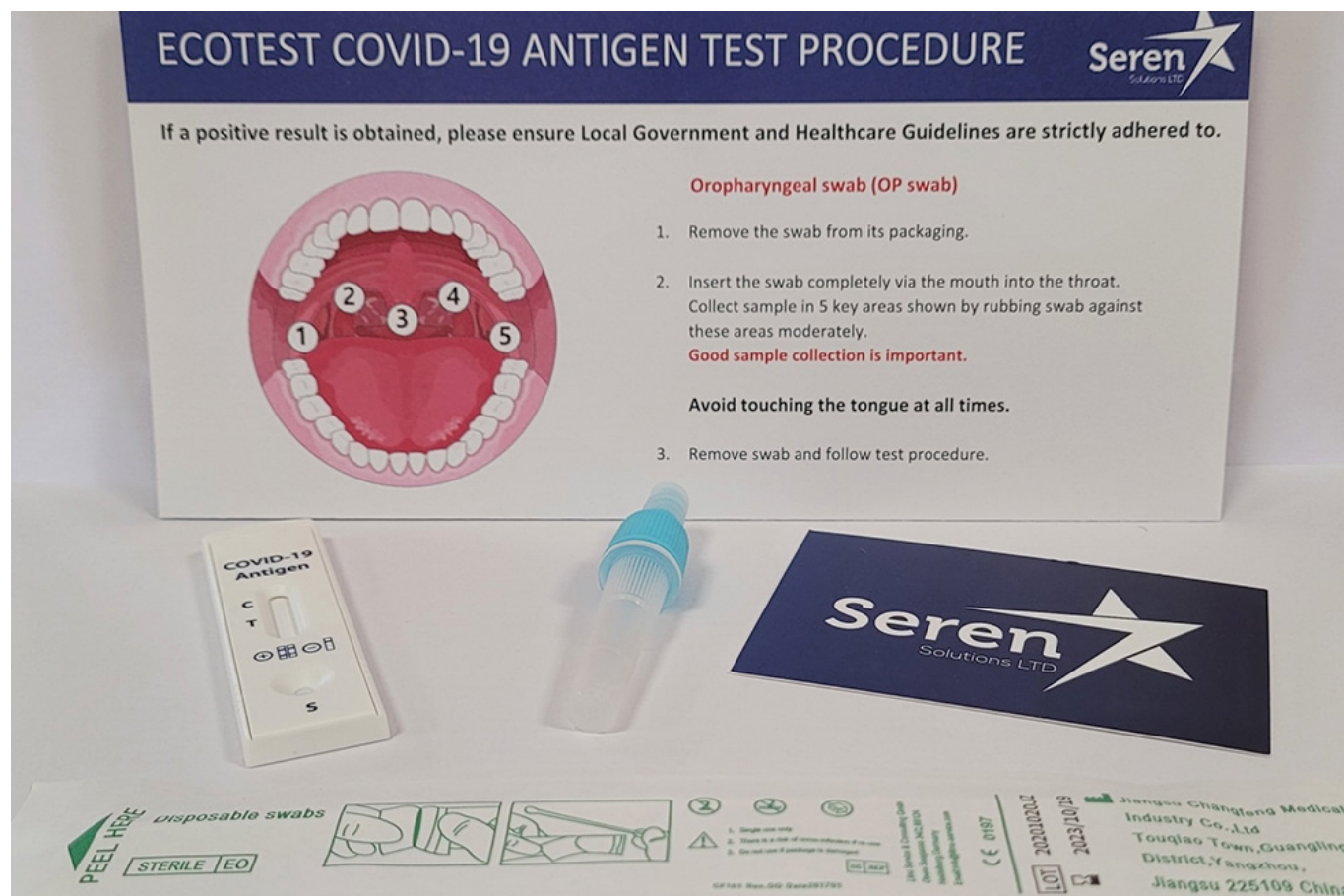


Keeping train and freight operating companies running during the pandemic

February 16, 2021



Director of Seren Solutions Ltd Mike Knapton on how his business is supporting the rail industry by providing thousands of rapid COVID-19 tests every week

The journey started off when a box of 20 COVID-19 tests were despatched to a train operating company back in April 2020. Now Mike and his team at **Seren Solutions** are delivering in excess of 4,000 Antigen Rapid Flow Tests every week.

Seren are specialists in medical screenings, vocational qualifications, apprenticeships and training in the construction industry, particularly the rail sector. Initially this testing initiative was identified as a critical support service to the industry and potential new revenue stream for the business. But as well as keeping his staff fully occupied, it has also proved an invaluable lifeline for operators in keep trains running during these very challenging times.

"A lab I work closely with approached me last year with a proposal for Seren to support an initiative providing a service to supply COVID tests and if there would be interest in the sectors I work in," said the Founder and Director of Seren.

"I didn't know of anybody that was providing such a service in the rail industry, yet I had lots of friends, particularly those that worked on the railways who were sat at home self-isolating and unable to go into work.

"I worked closely with one train operator initially during the first lockdown, supplying testing, which enabled the train crews to return to work promptly and it has just escalated from there."

Seren is now supplying in excess of 4,000 tests every week to 12 major train operating companies, with more being added on a weekly basis and now including the wider transportation sector such as 9 of the major bus companies.

"Working closely with the relevant sector bodies, an intense programme of trials and subsequent approvals during the early stages and further refinement has seen initial antibody testing replaced by the rapid flow antigen test," said Michael, who has been involved in the railways from a teen in everything from a PTS trackman to operating high output machinery, and now through to his current passion of rail training.

Although Seren has been supplying COVID tests since last April, Mike has also been working closely with those developing and improving the useability of the tests.

"I've been working with the manufacturers of the test directly," he said. "From an ecological and waste management perspective, one of the key issues was to minimise the amount of throw away elements of the product that were subject to controlled waste disposal.

"By collectively developing a redesigned unit we've reduced that and made the tests even simpler, so the manufacturers have now produce a one module system model which eliminates four of the throw away components of the test.

"This latest rapid device enables the user to obtain a test result within 15 minutes. This device is a high-quality and very effective product offering a very high degree of accuracy.

"Having these rapid tests has had a massive positive effect on the train operators ability to maintain a workable and efficient timetable. Particularly initially with train drivers who were working in bubbles themselves, so not one, but two drivers would be lost every time someone either showed symptoms or had to self-isolate because they had come into contact with someone who might have the virus.

"This testing regime has facilitated the creation of COVID free bubbles, with the first train operating company we worked with testing every seven days."

Earlier this month Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced that the Government was working with Network Rail and Transport for London on rolling out rapid testing. "We look forward to working collaboratively and in parallel with the government and transportation authorities to provide a comprehensive service," noted Mike.

He said: "The Government has just introduced smaller companies into COVID tests, with access to the

antigen test. We see the service provided by Seren as complimentary to this initiative.

“Clearly there will be ongoing mass community testing where, if you have symptoms, you will go to an NHS site or centre to get tested and that obviously entails having to take a time off work and isolating as appropriate until a negative test result is confirmed.”

One of the key aspects of the service Seren provides is associated with logistics and supplying in line with individual client requirements and providing flexibility of provision from individual to volume deliveries. Continual improvement in processing and packaging enables Mike to offer next-day doorstep delivery

He said: “Whereas I offer a door-to-door service. I am mindful to stay competitive when it comes to pricing making sure I offer those additional services to make it as convenient and comprehensive as possible and tailored to suit each client.”

Despite the roll out of the vaccinations being currently well underway, Mike expects to see the number of tests being delivered increasing and is in the process of training up new staff to meet the expected demand.

“The business does supply into other market sectors, including food manufacturing, leisure, construction and training companies, and I am currently in talks with most of the train and freight operating companies about testing all of their customer facing employees,” he said.

“There are talks of a mass testing programme across train operating companies where we test all the staff within the company to develop basically a ground zero and creating COVID free depots and offices.

“The railways continue to play a really important role in transporting key workers and goods throughout the UK and we want to continue playing our part to make sure their staff are safe and able to do so.”

Mike is now working with a large number of clients in spread of industries, offering advice and tailored testing programmes designed specifically for individual company’s requirements.

He said: “My ethos is to educate and raise awareness of the importance of testing employees in a specific way, rather than a more random approach. In the long run a more targeted approach can save money and potential down time of employees.”

If you would like to learn more about how your company could benefit from a tailored testing programme or you just want to have a chat with Mike for some advice, visit the website: www.serenolutions.co.uk