



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on April 6, 2020

Could Contaminated COVID-19 Tests Help Spread the Virus?

As the COVID-19 epidemic goes into another week and the government-mandated lockdown continues with no reasonable end in sight, fear of the virus is spreading faster than the virus itself. Part of what is causing the fear is the non-stop reporting showing the increase in both the number of infections and deaths. But a new report shows that some of the tests themselves are contaminated with coronavirus and could be spreading the disease.



A from *The Telegraph* last week stated:

Britain's attempt to ramp up mass coronavirus testing has been dealt a blow after key components ordered from overseas were discovered to be contaminated with coronavirus, the Telegraph can disclose.

And:

One of the suppliers — the Luxembourg-based firm Eurofins — sent an email on Monday morning to government laboratories in the UK warning that a delivery of key components called “probes and primers” had been contaminated with coronavirus.

There are a couple things that need to be unpacked in this. First, with the strict standards for medical equipment manufacturing — including testing equipment — how would tests not only become contaminated, but make it in to the supply chain? Second, with the possibility (even probability) that some number of contaminated tests were missed in the screening, there is a reasonable chance that a person could contract the virus from the tests themselves.

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Imagine that you are not carrying the virus, but you go in for testing and leave carrying the virus.

The Telegraph report stated that it is “not clear” how the tests were contaminated.

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed [more than 10,000 lives in the United States](#) as of this writing (a number that has more than tripled in the last week), citizens who are ordered to stay at home for the foreseeable future deserve to know that tests are safe. They at least deserve a better answer than “Hmmm... we don't know how that happened.” Because not knowing how it happened means there is no real plan of action to avoid it happening again.

And while this report is specifically about tests in the U.K., it speaks to the broader issue of testing everywhere. With the increased push for testing here in the United States, citizens need to know that being tested does not mean being exposed. And right now, we cannot know that.

In fact, this is not the first report of this type. In early March, Fox News [reported](#) that a CDC lab in Atlanta that assembled test kits was being investigated over concerns that the lab was contaminated



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with the virus.

From that report:

The Trump administration has reportedly ordered an investigation into a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lab in Atlanta that was in charge of assembling coronavirus test kits after a scientist with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) raised concerns that the lab itself may be “contaminated,” possibly leading to faulty test kits, according to reports.

Timothy Stenzel, the director of the Office of In Vitro Diagnostics and Radiological Health, went to the CDC lab in Atlanta last week to help “troubleshoot whatever technical problems might have been occurring with the tests” in an effort to get them to market faster, Axios first reported. Though not a lab inspector, Stenzel reportedly noticed “inappropriate procedures and possible contaminants” at the lab, raising his concerns to federal officials, which ultimately prompted the investigation.

The main concern then was whether the exposed tests would return a false positive — showing someone to be COVID-19 positive when they, in fact, were not. But given this newer report out of the U.K., perhaps the question should have been whether people were being exposed to the virus by the tests themselves.

As it is, these questions remain: Are false positives artificially raising the numbers of those counted as infected? And are contaminated tests helping spread the disease?

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