

WHO provides Iran with COVID-19 antibody tests

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TEHRAN – The World Health Organization (WHO), through a donation by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) in Germany, has provided Iran with over 67,500 enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) tests.

The tests, which measure the number of antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) in individuals, will be used for research and surveillance in Iran.

These kits will be used for seroepidemiologic studies in populations in different provinces to help us gain better insight into the prevalence of the disease in populations under study,” said Ali Akbar Haghdoost, deputy health minister for education.

A new working group has been established within the Epidemiology Committee of the National COVID-19 Headquarters, endorsed by the Minister of Health, to coordinate seroepidemiologic studies in the country.

Some of the tests were distributed based on the seroepidemiology workgroup’s recommendation to the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO) to ensure the quality of donated plasma. Tests were also provided to the Pasteur Institute of Iran for research on the immunity of key populations and assessing the quality of domestic diagnostic kits, and to the Pediatric Infections Research Center at Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in Tehran for a study on the prevalence of the epidemic among children.

Additional tests will be distributed by the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization is currently

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storing extra kits, and further distribution will be done according to recommendations by the committee.

Seroepidemiologic studies on SARS-CoV-2 are becoming ever more important, for further steering effectively public health measure, for better understanding of immunological reactions, for vaccine development and new treatment options. WHO will continue to provide strong support to the Ministry of Health in these areas, together with other partners such as the Robert Koch Institute,” said Christoph Hamelmann, WHO Representative in Iran.

Although this is the first time WHO supports the IBTO in COVID-19 response, this organization has contributed to controlling HIV, hepatitis C and other bloodborne infections in the recent decade through procedures conducted on donated blood products and counseling provided to donors as a strategy for ensuring blood safety,” said Omid Zamani, WHO National Professional Officer for Communicable Diseases.

Usually, antibodies against SARS-CoV-2 develop during the course of COVID-19 in infected patients. In the absence of a vaccine, they indicate a current or past infection, irrespective of whether the individual had a severe or mild disease or even an asymptomatic infection. It is not yet clear for how long after the infection the acquired antibodies will remain detectable in the blood, and to what degree they contribute to immunity.

The IBTO High Institute for Research and Education in Transfusion Medicine has been a designated WHO collaborating center since September 2013. The organization is screening blood donors nationwide and prepares plasma therapy kits for treating COVID-19 patients in hospitals.