

## Lex.

### Coronavirus tests: trial and error

Supermodel Naomi Campbell travels in a hazmat suit. The Kardashians have gone into quarantine. No one could accuse celebrities of making light of the Covid-19 crisis. But the rich and famous are coming under fire for getting diagnosed. They are accused of queue-jumping in countries where shortages of coronavirus tests affect even healthcare workers.

Fair? Hardly. But that is the "story of life" as US President Donald Trump put it bluntly. Plenty of people are willing to fork out a few hundred dollars to pay a private clinic for a mail order testing kit.

Tests for the wealthy will not solve the crisis. Scale is required. Otherwise any response is like trying to fight an outbreak "blindfolded", as the World Health Organization says. South Korea has managed to get a grip on its outbreak with stringent testing. An infection control experiment in the small Italian town of Vo', near Venice, stopped the spread by rigorous testing and retesting.

Western governments are planning to ramp up tests to tens of thousands a day. Big companies like Roche and Thermo Fisher are stepping up. Innovative biotechs are playing a role too. The UK government has ordered thousands of tests from Anglo-French Novacyt. Its shares are up eight-fold since the start of the year. Shares in Italy's DiaSorin are up 11 per cent since news this month that it had cut testing time to just one hour. Its test got the green light from US regulators yesterday.

The hunt is on for accurate ways of measuring antibodies the body develops to fight the virus. Such tests, already deployed in Asia, would shine a light on the spread of the disease, detecting even mild or asymptomatic cases weeks or months later. It would allow some people to go safely back to work, easing the lifting of lockdowns. Testing has been the weak link in rich countries' fight against the disease. It should soon become the strongest tool.