



HM Government



NATIONAL CORONAVIRUS TESTING PROGRAMME – EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY 18th MAY 2020

Thank you for your incredible support in delivering the largest ever expansion in British diagnostic capability over the last two months. Without the engagement of our key stakeholders across the country, we would not have been able to deliver testing at this scale – itself vital to defeating this awful disease.

So far over 1.8 million people have been tested for coronavirus in the UK. Enabling this has been a new network of 50 regional testing sites, 117 mobile testing units, delivery of 300,000 testing kits to 5,800 care homes, the delivery of 270,000 home-test kits, and testing in hospitals and other satellite centres across the country. This has truly been a joint endeavour, drawing in partners of all sectors, sizes and skillsets. As significant as this scale is, we want to make sure that every test counts in helping to stop the spread of the virus. Therefore, as we move towards rolling out our test and trace programme, we will increasingly be using our testing capabilities in a strategic and targeted way.

We will work closely with local authorities and others on the further expansion of this network as we deliver more capacity. Absolutely essential is ensuring that we facilitate more local ownership of testing; indeed our ambition is a national testing programme with a local delivery system.

We also recognise that we have not always got everything right. We are determined, as we cement the national testing programme, to minimise any operational problems and delays. It is our number one priority in the coming days and weeks to make sure that test results are turned around quickly. While the vast majority of people are currently receiving results within 48 hours, this needs to be consistent and improve.

As you know, we are now past the peak of infections and are moving forward with the next phase of our response. The new test and trace service will form a central part of this response. Ahead of rolling out the

*Those in Wales will be able to book a home-test only on the UK Government portal

test and trace service, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has today announced the expansion of testing eligibility.

Extending Eligibility for Testing

From today, everyone in England, Scotland, Wales* and Northern Ireland who is showing coronavirus symptoms is eligible to book a swab test to find out if they have the virus.

People can register for a test at www.nhs.uk/coronavirus, after checking their symptoms. Arrangements for essential workers are set out below.

Those in England and Wales who do not have any access to the internet, or who have difficulty with the digital portals, will be able to ring a new **119** service to book their test.

The four UK Chief Medical Officers have also announced today that **anosmia – the loss or a change in your normal sense of smell or taste – has been added as a symptom of COVID-19.**

This means that individuals need to self-isolate immediately – and will be eligible for a test – if they have a new continuous cough, or they have a high temperature, or they feel a loss or changed sense of normal smell or taste. All members of their household must also self-isolate according to current guidelines, unless the symptomatic individual receives a negative test result.

Access to Testing for Essential Workers

By the end of May, we will increase our testing capacity to 200,000 per day. While capacity continues to expand, it is crucial that those who run our essential services can still access a test when they need one.

We are therefore **ensuring that essential workers are prioritised for testing**, while allowing as many tests as possible for the wider population:

- [Essential Workers](#) and members of their household who have symptoms should continue to register for a test through the [Self-Referral and Employer Portals](#) on gov.uk. [Scotland](#), [Wales](#)* and [Northern Ireland](#) retain separate eligibility definitions for essential workers.

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- Care Homes in England can continue to register for delivery of tests for all their staff and residents, whether or not they have symptoms: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-care-home>. We have allocated 30,000 daily capacity for this channel, and our goal is to reach all care homes within initial scope (where the primary client is older people or those with dementia) by 6 June. Local Authorities providing us with referrals helps us ensure that those care homes identified as priorities receive tests as early as possible within that timeframe. We will work closely with local authorities to inform prioritisation and ensure regular reporting.

In terms of satellite sites, we are receiving plans for the expansion of existing facilities, new site proposals, and local care home testing from NHS and local authority colleagues across England. The objective is to **build a range of local proposals into an integrated plan**, whilst also, crucially, ensuring testing is available to all care homes.

As we implement the new test and trace service, we will ensure that we manage our capacity so that priority areas can continue to get a test if they need one. That way we can keep our country moving, protect the vulnerable and build the national recovery.

Enhanced contact tracing

We will shortly be announcing the launch of enhanced contact tracing arrangements in England, which will form an integral part of the test and trace service. This will be supported by 21,000 contact tracers who have now been hired and will play a vital role working to reach those who have been in close contact with someone who has developed coronavirus.

Test and trace will play a critical role in helping slow the spread of the virus, protect the NHS and help more people start to return to more normal lives. We look forward to working with you to continue to develop the test and trace service.

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