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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested

Guidance on coronavirus testing, including who is eligible for a test and how to get tested.

From:
> Department of Health and Social Care (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care)

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You can get a swab test to check if you currently have coronavirus. This is part of the 5-pillar strategy for coronavirus testing (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-scaling-up-testing-programmes). Testing is most effective within 3 days of symptoms developing.

Who can be tested

Anyone with symptoms (https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms) can get a coronavirus test, whatever their age.

> Get a coronavirus test as soon as you have symptoms (http://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test)

You may also be offered a test if you do not have symptoms.

Check if you can get a test from your local council (https://www.gov.uk/find-covid-19-lateral-flow-test-site), or contact your employer or place of study to find out more.

If you're in England, you may be offered twice-weekly rapid lateral flow tests if someone in your household, childcare bubble (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household) or support bubble (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household) goes to a school, nursery or college, or works at one.

Find out more about twice-weekly testing (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rapid-lateral-flow-testing-for-households-and-bubbles-of-school-pupils-and-staff).

Register a home test kit

This advice applies to home swab test kits that are sent to a lab for processing (PCR tests).

Once you've taken your sample, you must register it via the link below so that we can send your results to you:

Register a home test kit (https://test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/register-home-test)

Record a rapid lateral flow test result

If you had a rapid lateral flow test, you should get your result in 30 minutes after taking the test.

You must report a positive result to the NHS.

You can report your result online (https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result) or by telephone:

- England, Wales and Northern Ireland: 119 (free from mobiles and landlines)
- Scotland: 0300 303 2713 (charged at your standard network rate)

We also ask that you report negative and invalid results: this helps the NHS to monitor the spread of the virus and support communities across the UK.

You do not need to report the results of tests that are processed at our labs (PCR tests).

If you're about to go to hospital

You may need to get tested if you're due to have surgery or a procedure.

The hospital will arrange this for you. Contact your hospital department if you have any questions.

Testing for essential workers with symptoms

If you're an essential worker and have symptoms of coronavirus, you're prioritised to get a test for coronavirus through the self-referral portal (https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test).

See the list of essential workers prioritised for COVID-19 testing (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/essential-workers-prioritised-for-covid-19-testing).

Employers should direct essential workers to the self-referral portal to get a prioritised test as the employer referral portal is now closed.

The testing process

The first step of taking a test for coronavirus usually involves taking a swab of the nose and the back of the throat, which can be done by the person themselves (self-administered) or by someone else (assisted).

The different ways you can get tested are covered below.

Test sites

We've established a network of drive-through and walk-through test sites for people with coronavirus symptoms. Test sites are open 7 days a week. If you have symptoms you can book a test at a site near you online (https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test) or by calling 119.

Around 1 in 3 people with coronavirus do not have any symptoms. There are sites being set up where people without symptoms can take rapid tests.

Check if you can get a test from your local council (https://www.gov.uk/find-covid-19-lateral-flow-test-site), or contact your employer or place of study to find out more.

Home tests

Home test kits can be delivered to your door so you can test yourself and your family without leaving your home.

Instructions in alternative formats

See instructions on testing for coronavirus at home in accessible formats (http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/testing-for-coronavirus-at-home).

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) can send you braille, audio or large print instructions. After ordering a home test you can either:

- send a request online (https://www.rnib.org.uk/coronavirus-updates/test-kit-instructions/request?utm_source=referral&utm_medium=promo&utm_campaign=home-testing)
- call 0303 123 9999 (Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, Saturday 9am to 1pm)

Get help to register and take the test

You can have a live video call with specially trained NHS Test and Trace staff to help you register and take a home coronavirus test. Download the free Be My Eyes app for IOS (https://apps.apple.com/app/apple-store/id905177575?mt=8) or for Android (https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.bemyeyes.bemyeyes) and go to the 'specialised help' section.

Home swab test kits that are sent to a lab for processing (PCR tests)

Most people get their result the next day but it can take up to 3 days. Anyone with symptoms can get a test online (https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test) or by calling 119.

How to take a coronavirus self-test swab

Rapid tests that give a result in 30 minutes (lateral flow tests)

You may be given a rapid test kit by your local council, workplace, university or school. Contact them to find out more.

Learn more about rapid lateral flow tests (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-lateral-flow-antigen-testing-for-people-without-symptoms).

Getting your results

How and when you get your results depends on the type of coronavirus test you're taking. Follow the instructions that come with your kit carefully to ensure you take the right steps for the kit you're using.

Get a test if you're visiting a care home

If you're visiting someone at a care home, you may be offered a rapid coronavirus test when you arrive. The care home you're visiting will provide you with the test kit. The test can tell if you're infectious or not within 2 hours.

You'll also be asked to put on protective clothing (PPE) as an additional step to help protect vulnerable residents. The degree of contact you can have with a care home resident will also depend on the care home's own regulations and on national restrictions.

How to Prepare For Your Care Home Visit

See guidance on visiting arrangements in care homes (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus).

Mobile testing units

Mobile testing units travel around the UK to increase access to coronavirus testing. They respond to need, travelling to test essential workers at sites including care homes, police stations and prisons.

New units are being brought into operation each day.

Satellite centres

NHS capability is being increased by providing test kits directly to 'satellite' centres at places like hospitals that have a particularly urgent or significant need.

NHS facilities

Testing within an NHS facility such as a hospital is available for patients and some NHS workers.

Across all these testing methods, there is a network of couriers who collect the completed samples and deliver them safely to one of our laboratories. The swab samples are analysed at our labs and the result is communicated back to the individual.

We aim to return test results within 48 hours of a swab being taken, or within 72 hours for a home test.

Care homes

Please see:

- guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) testing in adult care homes
  (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-in-adult-care-homes)
- coronavirus (COVID-19) testing for adult social care settings
  (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-adult-social-care-settings)

Published 15 April 2020
Last updated 1 April 2021 + show all updates

1. 1 April 2021
   Updated to add links to the Be My Eyes app for help registering and taking a test.
2. 24 March 2021
   Added links to new pages on testing in adult care homes and in all adult social care settings.
3. 19 March 2021
   Updated information on lateral flow tests for people in a support bubble who go to or work at a school, nursery or college.
4. 27 February 2021
   Updated to add information on lateral flow tests for secondary school children and for people who work in a school.
5. 26 February 2021
   Updated to reflect that the employer referral portal is now closed and employers should direct essential workers to the self-referral portal to get a prioritised test.
6. 23 February 2021
   Under 'documents for care homes using the online application portal' renamed 'care home testing guidance for residents and staff: PCR and LFD (England)' to 'care home testing guidance for residents and staff: PCR and rapid lateral flow (England)' and updated it to reflect new guidance on return box tracking and updated sample swabbing instructions.
7. 16 February 2021
   Under 'documents for care homes using the online application portal', added 'care home testing schedule for a suspected or confirmed outbreak (England)' and updated 'care home testing guidance for residents and staff: PCR and LFD (England)' to reflect additional outbreak testing and 90-day testing window guidance.
8. 10 February 2021
   Added details on getting instructions on home tests for the blind or visually impaired, and changed the length of time for lateral flow test results (from 2 hours to 30 minutes).
9. 5 February 2021
   Under 'documents for care homes using the online application portal', updated 'care home testing guidance for LFD self-testing at home' to reflect a new registration process (the option to create user accounts when self-registering).
10. 2 February 2021
    Updated the attachment 'Care home testing guidance for residents and staff: PCR and LFD (England)' in the 'Care homes' section to remove references to tiers, update testing schedules and update the registration process for LFD barcodes.
11. 25 January 2021
    Under 'Documents for care homes using the online application portal' added link to new guidance publication: 'care home testing guidance for LFD self-testing at home'.
12. 22 January 2021
    Added information on testing in care homes in Northern Ireland.

13. 15 January 2021

    Added information about Lateral Flow Antigen Tests.

14. 15 January 2021

    Added how-to videos section, including 'how to take a coronavirus self-test swab', 'how to test a child for coronavirus', 'how to test care home residents for coronavirus' and 'how to test people in a mental health or learning disabilities care setting'.

15. 15 January 2021

    Updated to remove information on rapid swab (lateral flow) tests.

16. 15 January 2021

    Updated with information on asymptomatic testing and other recently introduced testing.

17. 6 January 2021

    Updated 'Care home testing guidance for residents and staff: PCR and LFD (England)' to add information on using handheld scanners and registering tests in bulk.

18. 30 December 2020

    Under 'List of essential workers and those prioritised for testing in England', amended transport workers section to add border workers, those critical to EU transition and those supporting the operation of critical transport and border infrastructure through which supply chains pass.

19. 24 December 2020

    Under 'List of essential workers and those prioritised for testing in England', added workers critical to EU transition.

20. 23 December 2020

    Updated 2 documents: 'Care home testing guidance for residents and staff: PCR and LFD (England)' and 'Graphic summarising testing for care home staff and residents' to reflect new policy on staff testing with lateral flow devices (LFDs).

21. 18 December 2020

    Updated 'information about testing kits' and added updated guidance documents 'graphic summarising testing for care home staff and residents', 'care home testing guidance for residents and staff: PCR and LFD (England)' and 'how to use PCR test kits'.

22. 14 December 2020

    Added links to lists of essential workers prioritised for testing in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

23. 10 December 2020

    Under 'who can be tested', added examples of people who may be offered a test without symptoms. Under 'test sites', added that test sites are open 7 days a week.

24. 26 November 2020

    Updated link for 'book your courier collection'.

25. 19 November 2020

    Updated 'guidance on non-Randox testing (England)' to reflect latest guidance and clinical advice.

26. 19 November 2020

    Updated the 'graphic summarising testing for care homes' to reflect latest guidance and clinical advice.

27. 6 November 2020

    Replaced 'graphic summarising testing for care homes' with updated version that reflects that individuals who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 should not be included in testing until after 90 days of their initial onset of symptom or, if asymptomatic when tested, their positive test result.

28. 5 October 2020

    Small amendment made to how to register a home test kit for clarity.

29. 30 September 2020
Added 'students on clinical placements' to list of essential workers and those prioritised for testing (England only).

30. 17 September 2020
Added link to register a home test kit before a hospital procedure.

31. 7 September 2020
Added link to register a home test kit.

32. 4 September 2020
Removed suggested templates for recording resident and staff tests because they are no longer required.

33. 28 August 2020
Updated following attachments to reflect updates to the registration portal: 'guidance on non-Randox testing (England)' and 'how to use non-Randox test kits'.

34. 12 August 2020
Added a return label for returning recalled Randox test kits to the 'Documents for care homes using the online application portal' section.

35. 10 August 2020
Added 2 documents to the 'home testing' section: 'coronavirus home test: step-by-step guide' and 'coronavirus test guide: how to test on a child'

36. 31 July 2020
Updated section 'Regular testing in care homes (England)' to state that the remaining CQC-registered adult care homes (for those aged under 65) will be able to register for retesting from 31 August. Added 2 new attachments for care homes: 'graphic summarising testing for care homes' and 'care home testing: information sheet for care providers'.

37. 28 July 2020
Updated to reflect that there is now a single GOV.UK testing service for people who have symptoms and want to get tested.

38. 23 July 2020
Updated to reflect that under-5s in Scotland can now access testing. Eligibility for NHS and essential worker testing is now the same across the UK.

39. 20 July 2020
Updated 2 documents in section 'Documents for care homes using the online application portal': 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'guidance on non-Randox testing'. These have been updated to reflect changes to clinical guidelines that people testing positive will need to be retested after 6 weeks. The 'guidance on Randox testing' document also includes a note to say that Randox test kits should not be used for testing until further notice.

40. 16 July 2020
Added link to information on problem with Randox test kits, requiring all settings to pause the use of these test kits.

41. 16 July 2020
Updated to reflect that children under 5 years old can now get tested in Northern Ireland.

42. 6 July 2020
Replaced 2 attachments: 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'guidance on non-Randox testing'. The changes reflect the new retesting programme for care homes, including how often staff and residents should retest. The sections in the guidance that talk about next steps for positive testing patients have been removed. Instead, people are directed to Public Health England guidance in the 'Future advice' section.

43. 3 July 2020

    Added information on regular care home testing (retesting) in England.

44. 1 July 2020

    Updated 2 attachments to reflect changes to the registration system for these testing kits: 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'how to use Randox test kits'.

45. 26 June 2020

    Replaced all non-Randox guidance documents in 'Documents for care homes using the online application' section to include the updated prelabelled instructions for England, Scotland and Wales.

46. 25 June 2020

    Replaced the following attachments with updated registration link: 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'how to use Randox test kits'.

47. 18 June 2020

    'Drive-through appointment' has been changed to 'test site appointment' in the 'Arrange a test if you're an essential worker' section. 'Drive-through regional testing sites' has been changed to 'drive-through and walk-through test sites' in the 'Test sites' section.

48. 17 June 2020

    Added guidance on care homes testing in Wales and a new attachment: 'guidance on non-Randox testing (Wales)'. Replaced 'guidance on Randox testing', 'guidance on non-Randox testing' and 'how to use Randox test kits'.

49. 11 June 2020

    Added attachment: 'guidance on non-Randox testing (Scotland)'.

50. 8 June 2020

    Added guidance about testing care home staff and residents in Scotland.

51. 5 June 2020

    Added information and link to book a courier collection for used testing kits in care homes. Replaced 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'guidance on non-Randox testing'. Removed: 'This testing is currently only available in England. At the moment, you can only get tests if your care home looks after older people or people with dementia.'

52. 2 June 2020

    Added documents for care homes: 'How to use Randox test kits' and 'How to use non-Randox test kits'.

53. 1 June 2020

    Two documents have been replaced with updated versions to reflect the new courier collection process for care homes: 'guidance pack for care home managers on non-Randox test kits (e.g. Kingfisher)' and 'guidance pack for care home managers on Randox kits'.

54. 29 May 2020

    Added that NHS testing for children under 5 years old is only available in England and Scotland.

55. 29 May 2020

    Added that children under 5 years old in Wales who have symptoms of coronavirus and live with an essential worker can now be tested.

56. 28 May 2020

    Updated to reflect that essential worker testing is available in Wales, and that testing for 5-year-olds with symptoms of coronavirus and living with an essential worker is available in England only.

57. 28 May 2020

    Added that children under 5 years old in England and Wales who have symptoms of coronavirus and live with an essential worker can now be tested.

58. 19 May 2020

    Added a link to book a drive-through test appointment if you have a verification code.

59. 18 May 2020

    Added information on the NHS testing service for people with coronavirus symptoms.

60. 14 May 2020

    Amended wording on what to do if a care home suspects a resident has coronavirus symptoms and how to test care home residents and workers. Added updated version of the visual guide to adult social care testing.

61. 11 May 2020

    Added information on testing for care home residents and workers (England only).

62. 4 May 2020

    Added unpaid carers to list of essential workers and those prioritised for testing (England only).

63. 3 May 2020

    Added personal care assistants to list of essential workers

64. 29 April 2020

    Updates have been made to the 'Who can be tested' section for clarity. We're also now testing: social care workers and residents in care homes (with or without symptoms) both to investigate outbreaks and, following successful pilots, as part of a rolling programme to test all care homes, and NHS workers and patients without symptoms where there is a clinical need, in line with NHS England guidance.

65. 28 April 2020

    Clarified that the new testing criteria apply to England only. Added that anyone with symptoms living with someone who is eligible is themselves also eligible for a test.

66. 28 April 2020

    Added categories to list of people who can be tested.

67. 27 April 2020

    Updated to reflect that test booking routes are now available for essential workers in Northern Ireland, and updated employer referral requirements.

68. 24 April 2020

    Updated to reflect that test booking routes are now available for essential workers in Scotland.

69. 24 April 2020

    Updated the list of essential workers and added information on when more testing kits and appointment slots will become available.

70. 24 April 2020

    Added guidance for essential workers and employers about arranging a test, including a link to the self-referral service.

71. 23 April 2020

    Added updated list of essential workers.

72. 17 April 2020

    Updated with expanded list of frontline workers eligible for coronavirus (COVID-19) testing in England and information on the different test options that are being developed.

73. 15 April 2020

    First published.

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Related content

- Register for an antibody test kit to check if you've had coronavirus before (https://www.gov.uk/register-coronavirus-antibody-test)
- Report a COVID-19 rapid lateral flow test result (https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result)
- NHS Test and Trace: what to do if you are contacted (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works)
- COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance)
- Making a support bubble with another household (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household)

Collection

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): adult social care guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-social-care-guidance)

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- Healthcare workers, carers and care settings during coronavirus (https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/healthcare-workers-carers-and-care-settings)
- Testing for coronavirus (COVID-19) (https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/testing)