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Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested

Guidance on coronavirus testing, including who is eligible for a test, how to get tested and the different types of test available.

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From:

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

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One of the most challenging things about coronavirus is the uncertainty: not knowing who has the infection or when it's safe to return to normal life. Good-quality testing can help provide us with greater certainty. It's a big part of how we're going to defeat this disease.

As part of the government's 5-pillar strategy for coronavirus testing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-scaling-up-testing-programmes>), we are testing people who have coronavirus-like symptoms to see if they currently have the virus.

Who can be tested

Our priority is testing patients to inform their clinical diagnosis.

We are also testing:

- all essential workers including NHS and social care workers with symptoms (see the full list of essential workers)
- anyone over 65 with symptoms
- anyone with symptoms whose work cannot be done from home (for example, construction workers, shop workers, emergency plumbers and delivery drivers)

- anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus and lives with any of those identified above

Additionally, we are 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
- NHS workers and patients without symptoms, in line with NHS England guidance

This means anyone in one of these groups can find out whether they have the virus. Testing is most effective within 3 days of symptoms developing.

Please note that these lists apply to England only. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own lists and criteria. See more information on:

- Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-process>)
- Northern Ireland (<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/coronavirus-national-testing-programme-key-workers>)
- Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-for-key-workers-in-Scotland/>)

Arrange a test

The self-referral and employer referral test booking routes are available for England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Self-referral

Apply for a coronavirus test (<https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test>)

You can select a regional test site drive-through appointment or home test kit.

Home test kit availability will initially be limited but more will become available.

The user guide explains how to use the online self-referral service.

Self-referral portal: user guide

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/882654/Self_referral_portal_user_guide_v1.6.pdf)

PDF, 2.34MB, 35 pages

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Employer referral

The employer referral portal allows employers to refer essential workers who are self-isolating either because they or member(s) of their household have coronavirus symptoms, for testing.

For most employees, only symptomatic people in the household can be tested. If the employee works in social care, however, the employee can be tested whether symptomatic or asymptomatic.

It is a secure portal for employers to use to upload the full list of names and contact details of self-isolating essential workers.

If referred through this portal, essential workers will receive a text message with a unique invitation code to book a test for themselves (if symptomatic) or their symptomatic household member(s) at a regional testing site.

In order to obtain a login, employers of essential workers should email portalservicedesk@dhsc.gov.uk with:

- organisation name
- nature of the organisation's business
- region
- names (where possible) and email addresses of the 2 users who will load essential worker contact details

Once employer details have been verified, 2 login credentials will be issued for the employer referral portal.

The testing process

The test 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.

Regional testing sites

We are establishing a network of drive-through regional testing sites. We aim to open 48 sites by the end of April.

Watch a video explaining the process for drive-through testing:

Visiting a regional test site for your coronavirus test (e...



Home testing

Home test kits can be delivered to someone's door so they can test themselves and their family without leaving the house. Home test kit availability will be initially limited, but more will become available.

If you have been delivered a home testing kit or have been given a self-test kit at a regional test site, here is a tutorial video that supports the written instructions in your pack, from Dr Amir Khan:

How to take a coronavirus self-test swab



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.

List of essential workers and those prioritised for testing (England only)

- all NHS and social care staff, including:
 - doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers
 - the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector
 - those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines, and medical and personal protective equipment
 - NHS Blood and Transplant frontline staff (blood donation staff, specialist nurses for organ donation, staff running therapeutic apheresis services in NHS hospitals)
 - those providing ancillary support to NHS workers (such as hotel accommodation for NHS staff)
 - personal care assistants
- essential public services staff, including:
 - prisons, probation, courts and tribunals staff, judiciary
 - religious staff
 - charities and workers delivering critical frontline services
 - those responsible for the management of the deceased
 - journalists and broadcasters covering coronavirus or providing public service broadcasting
 - public health and environmental staff, such as specialist community public health nursing
- public safety and national security staff, including:
 - police and support staff
 - Ministry of Defence civilians, contractors and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of critical defence and national security outputs and critical to the response to the coronavirus pandemic), including defence medical staff
 - fire and rescue service employees (including support staff),
 - National Crime Agency staff, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas
 - British Transport Police and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency
- transport workers, including:

- those who keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the coronavirus response
- those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass
- education and childcare workers, including:
 - support and teaching staff
 - social workers
 - specialist education professionals
- critical personnel in the production and distribution of food, drink and essential goods, including:
 - those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery
 - those critical to the provision of other essential goods, such as medical supply chain and distribution workers, including community pharmacy and testing (such as PHE labs), and veterinary medicine
 - workers critical to the continuity of essential movement of goods
- local and national government staff critical to the effective delivery of the coronavirus response, or delivering essential public services, such as the payment of benefits
- public and environmental health staff, including in government agencies and arm's length bodies
- funeral industry workers
- frontline local authority staff and volunteers, including
 - those working with vulnerable children and adults, victims of domestic abuse, and the homeless and rough sleepers (and hotel staff supporting these groups)
 - voluntary sector organisations providing substance misuse treatment
- utilities, communication and financial services staff, including:
 - staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure)
 - the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage)
 - information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the coronavirus response
 - essential staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 essential services), postal services and delivery, payments providers and waste disposal sectors

Read the privacy notice on coronavirus testing for essential workers

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-privacy-information>).

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1. 3 May 2020

Added personal care assistants to list of essential workers

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 28 April 2020

Added categories to list of people who can be tested.

5. 27 April 2020
Updated to reflect that test booking routes are now available for essential workers in Northern Ireland, and updated employer referral requirements.
6. 24 April 2020
Updated to reflect that test booking routes are now available for essential workers in Scotland.
7. 24 April 2020
Updated the list of essential workers and added information on when more testing kits and appointment slots will become available.
8. 24 April 2020
Added guidance for essential workers and employers about arranging a test, including a link to the self-referral service.
9. 23 April 2020
Added updated list of essential workers.
10. 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.
11. 15 April 2020
First published.

Related content

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): adult social care guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-social-care-guidance>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): adult social care action plan (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-adult-social-care-action-plan>)
- COVID-19: how to work safely in care homes (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-care-homes>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): personal protective equipment (PPE) hub (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): admission and care of people in care homes (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-admission-and-care-of-people-in-care-homes>)

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