

COVID-19 – MANAGING ON-SITE TESTING

Lateral Flow Antigen Testing for People without symptoms

An explanation of the technology behind asymptomatic testing and the role these tests may play in the national Covid-19 testing programme.

NHS Test and Trace is making rapid lateral flow antigen testing available alongside standard lab-based [polymerase chain reaction \(PCR\) tests](#). Around 1 in 3 individuals with COVID-19 do not display symptoms. Opening testing up to catch those showing no symptoms will help to find positive cases earlier and to break hidden chains of transmission.

These tests play a different, but crucial role in the fight against COVID-19 and are now open to companies listed within the set criteria, below.

Further guidance on the testing being offered and how it works is also documented, along with the instructions to gain access to the government funded operation to enable companies to conduct their own 'On-site Testing'.

WHAT IS LATERAL FLOW ANTIGEN TESTING

Lateral flow testing is a fast and simple way to test people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19, but who may still be spreading the virus. In some circumstances lateral flow tests can also be used for other diagnostic tasks.

The tests are easy to use and give results in 30 minutes. Those who test positive must immediately self-isolate to avoid passing the virus on to others.

WHY LATERAL FLOW TESTS ARE BEING OFFERED

Around 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 do not have symptoms, so a test that rapidly detects these otherwise hidden cases is a very useful additional tool for tackling the virus.

Lateral flow tests are practical, easy to interpret and can be used in a wide range of settings. This makes them ideal for widespread use in the community.

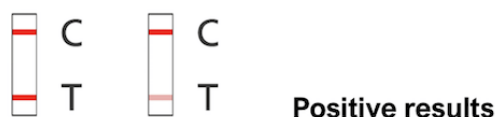
Clinical evaluation [by Public Health England \(PHE\) and Oxford University](#) shows that the tests perform best when levels of virus are at their highest. [Thousands of positive COVID-19 cases](#) have already been detected using these tests.

Each positive case identified can help prevent many additional people becoming infected over time.

HOW THE LATERAL FLOW TESTING WORKS

Lateral flow is an established technology, adapted to detect proteins (antigens) that are present when a person has COVID-19. The best-known example of a lateral flow test is the home pregnancy test kit.

The test kit is a hand-held device with an absorbent pad at one end and a reading window at the other. Inside the device is a strip of test paper that changes colour in the presence of COVID-19 proteins (antigens).



Negative result: one line next to C shows the test is negative.

Positive result: two lines, one next to C and one next to T, even faint lines, shows the test is positive. You or your test provider must report this test result to the NHS.

Void: no lines, or one line next to T, means the test is void. You will need to re-take with a fresh test kit.

If you get a positive result you must self-isolate immediately, preventing further transmission of the virus.

A negative result means that active coronavirus infection was not detected, at the time of the test. However, this does not guarantee that you do not have coronavirus. You should continue to follow coronavirus rules, including regular hand washing, social distancing and face coverings where required.

HOW TO TAKE THE TEST

Taking a lateral flow test usually involves taking a sample from the back of the throat near the tonsils and from the nose, using a swab.

The swab is dipped into an extraction solution. This is then dripped on to the device's paper pad, producing the reaction that gives the result.

The result will be visible on the device precisely 30 minutes after the sample is applied. Unlike a PCR test, there is no need to send the sample to a lab.

WHO CAN BE TESTED?

Lateral flow testing is currently being offered to people who do not have symptoms, and are now available across the industry.

Testing is to be conducted as 'Assisted' – this means employees will conduct the swab testing under the supervision of a trained operator/employee who then processes the test and reads the result.

If you do have symptoms of Covid-19 you **SHOULD NOT** visit an asymptomatic test site. **YOU SHOULD SELF-ISOLATE IMMEDIATELY** and follow the guidelines.

PLEASE NOTE: If the following symptoms of the virus occur, you can head to a **PCR test centre** which will re-confirm Coronavirus. **PLEASE DO NOT TAKE A FURTHER TEST FOR ANY OTHER REASON;**

- You have a high temperature
- You have a new, continuous cough
- You've lost your sense of smell or taste or it has changed

HOW EFFECTIVE IS LATERAL FLOW ANTIGEN TESTING?

Lateral flow tests can help to drive down the spread of COVID-19.

Lateral flow tests deliver a rapid result, in 30 minutes. They can find positive cases with high levels of virus that are easy to transmit to others, helping to intercept and reduce further infections.

Lateral flow tests used by the UK government go through a rigorous evaluation by the country's leading scientists. This means they are accurate, reliable and successfully identify those with COVID-19 who don't show symptoms and could spread the virus without realising.

Lateral flow tests are not being offered in isolation, but alongside a range of other measures to drive down cases and break chains of transmission. See more on this topic on the [Public Health England blog](#).

HOW SENSITIVE ARE THE TESTS?

'Sensitivity' refers to the proportion of people with COVID-19 that have a positive test.

When a person has low levels of virus in their system, lateral flow tests are less sensitive than some of the other tests we use, such as PCR tests which we mainly use for people with symptoms.

When levels of virus are at their highest and people are most likely to pass on the disease, lateral flow tests can detect [the vast majority of cases](#).

PCR and lateral flow have different roles to play in controlling the virus, so it isn't helpful to directly compare them in terms of how sensitive they are:

- **Lateral flow is useful for finding out if a person is infectious now**, and able to transmit the virus to others. The level of sensitivity is high enough to detect the vast majority of these cases. Lateral flow testing is less likely to return a positive result outside the infectious window.
- **PCR is useful for confirming a suspected case of coronavirus**, where the person is already self-isolating and is showing symptoms. Higher sensitivity of PCR means it can identify genetic material from COVID-19 even after the active infection has passed.

The different levels of sensitivity are therefore appropriate for the ways they are used.

HOW LATERAL FLOW TESTING WAS TRIALLED

The tests underwent a rigorous [validation process](#) including evaluations from Public Health England and the University of Oxford. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) provides ongoing regulatory oversight. Trials were carried out on the tests in a wide range of environments.

Large-scale pilots have also been carried out, including the whole city pilot in Liverpool in November 2020. As a result of the pilot, 897 positive individuals who would not otherwise have known they were infected, tested positive using lateral flow tests.

This includes piloting the regular testing of contacts of people who tested positive for coronavirus in order to find more coronavirus cases and break the chains of transmission, as people who have had close contact with a confirmed positive case are at higher risk than normal of having the virus.

A [recent study](#) suggests that regular testing contacts of confirmed cases is an effective way to reduce transmission of COVID-19, and could potentially reduce the need for self-isolation for contacts of positive cases.

IS THERE A CRITERIA TO BE ACCEPTED FOR ON-SITE TESTING?

There will be set criteria to meet, to enable registering for on-site testing;

- Company will have a minimum 50 employees within the workplace
- Employees testing is for those who cannot work from home
- Company must be registered in England (there are separate pilots which will be run in Wales and Northern Ireland)

The following employees cannot take part in this pilot, but these are currently with the government testing team and being worked through;

- Mobile Workers / Engineers
- Home Start / Home Workers
- Those on furlough will not be required to take part in the company testing

Companies under 50 employees cannot take part, although this is also being worked through with government.

Testing Kits will be available within government funding up until 31st March 2021. Although, it's being recommended to extend this date, government are currently in review.

HOW DO I SIGN-UP FOR ON-SITE TESTING

The following is an indication of the steps which will be required to proceed with On-site Testing – Government run a full suite of webinars which take you through the operational steps to manage the testing safely and accurately for your employees.

1	<p>Its recommended that an employee is selected as a 'Main Point of Contact' within the business to manage this project, and to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act as the main contact for the government testing team - Attend the webinars and introduce the plans on site - Manage the on-site testing operation to ensure it runs smoothly, and complies with the rules set out by government testing team - Ensure the regular ordering of Covid-19 testing kits
2	<p>You'll need to register interest and await response from government that you're accepted – use this online link to apply https://www.gov.uk/get-workplace-coronavirus-tests</p> <p>You'll be asked to provide the following information;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Company Name - Company Registration Number - Main Point of Contact Name and Email Address <p>You'll be asked for company registration details when registering your interest. Where this cannot be provided, the validation process takes a while longer. Please take note of the reference number which is shared at the end of the registration process.</p>
3	<p>You'll be asked to join the webinar 'Introduction to Asymptomatic Testing'</p> <p>You can email P&P Sector Testing Queries - P-and-PSector@dhsc.gov.uk to show your interest in joining the first step of webinars, and advise that you've registered your interest – they should email through the next webinar information.</p>

4	<p>You'll then be asked to join the Operational Overview Webinar</p> <p>This will provide you with information how to organise and set-up your on-site testing area and facility. You'll also be taken through how to calculate the number of kits you'll need to order, and how to order to ensure you don't run-out.</p> <p>These run daily 14:30 – 16:00 daily and you'll be provided with log-in details for these sessions.</p>
5	<p>Those who you've selected the team to manage the Testing Procedure for your employees, will need to attend a Training Course to ensure the testing is undertaken accurately, safely and within the government rules. Details for these sessions will be made available to you.</p>
6	<p>A full resources pack will be available to the team, within a government portal called Egress. This will provide you will all the latest presentations from the webinars, operational procedures, look-up guidebooks, privacy policies, useful set-up instructions, test kit order forms etc. This portal area will provide everything you need.</p>
7	<p>Daily Q & A Sessions are running to answer any questions you have – details of these sessions will be available to you once registered and accepted.</p>

CAN AN EMPLOYER REQUIRE EMPLOYEES TO BE TESTED FOR CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)?

All individuals with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are eligible for a [test provided by the NHS](#), to show if they currently have the virus, although certain groups have priority for testing. Some employers may consider providing testing for their own employees, including where they do not currently have symptoms, to prevent transmission in the workplace.

Information about employees' health, including whether or not they have tested positive for coronavirus, or have particular symptoms, is special category data under the General Data

Protection Regulation (2016/679 EU) (GDPR). Employers considering testing employees for coronavirus should do so only if they can comply with their GDPR obligations relating to the processing of such data. The process listed above will be generated through NHS led instruction and all information and data will be held by the NHS.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has published guidance for employers on [workplace testing](#). The guidance states that employers can rely on their health and safety duties as a ground for processing special category data in these circumstances, but that the employer should carry out a data protection impact assessment before carrying out testing and should process employees' health data only if this is necessary and proportionate. They should collect the minimum data necessary and ensure that this is kept secure. They must provide employees with information, including on what health data will be collected, what it will be used for, who (if anyone) it will be shared with and for how long it will be kept.

If an employee does not agree to take a test, they cannot be forced to do so. In certain circumstances, it may be open to employers to take disciplinary action against an employee who refuses a test, but this would depend on factors such as the nature of the employee's work and any evidence on the necessity of testing in the particular environment.

The Government has published [guidance for employers and third-party healthcare providers](#) on coronavirus testing.

For further information contact the BOSS Health & Safety Team

Disclaimer –

Government advice is changing constantly, it's encouraged to check with the government websites.

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