



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

## THE COVID-19 NATIONAL TESTING PROGRAMME: PILLAR 2 INFORMATION SHEET AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Our Strategy**

Our ultimate goal is that anyone who needs a COVID-19 test should have one. But this will take time to achieve. There is huge international demand for crucial testing materials like kits, swabs and chemical reagents, and we need to scale up our national manufacturing capabilities.

As we build our testing capacity, we will be rolling out testing to different groups in a phased approach. We started with patients who needed their test for clinical care, then moved to include NHS keyworkers who were self-isolating, so they can safely return to work as quickly as possible. For those NHS keyworkers self-isolating because a household member had symptoms, we also moved to testing the household member as a negative result allow the NHS keyworker to stop self-isolating straight away. We are now in the process of starting to test other staff in critical roles, such as social care workers and police officers, and will expand to the wider community over time.

Our testing strategy has five pillars:

The first pillar is boosting swab testing – testing to find out if you have the virus – by Public Health England and NHS labs for patients and frontline workers in the NHS. We have already reached our ambition of 10,000 tests per day by the end of March as we committed. We are now committed to reaching 25,000 tests per day by the end of April at the latest.

The second pillar is the creation of brand-new swab testing capacity delivered by commercial partners. Again, this is swab testing to tell if people have the virus. This lets people tested know if they and their household members need to continue to self-isolate. The biggest part of this pillar is the partnership with universities, research institutes and companies such as Amazon and Boots, to build a network of new labs and testing sites across the UK. This new service launched at the end of March and is ramping up rapidly. We are also working with other testing companies to expand Pillar 2 so that over time we have many different commercial companies delivering mass swab testing.

The third pillar is antibody tests, which are designed to detect if people have had the virus and are now immune. These could potentially be done at home with a finger prick and deliver results in as little as twenty minutes. We are currently working with several companies who are offering these tests and are evaluating their effectiveness. Antibody tests offer the hope

that people who think they have had the disease but no are longer ill or have symptoms, will know they are immune and get back to life as normal. But crucially, they have to be proven to work.

The fourth pillar is surveillance. We are conducting some of the biggest surveys in the world to find out what proportion of the population have already had the virus. This is done using a high accuracy antibody test operated by Public Health England at their Porton Down science campus. We will use these tests to help strengthen our scientific understanding and inform us all on the big choices we have to make about social distancing measures and how we exit from this crisis.

The fifth pillar is the most ambitious. We want to build, in a short space of time, a large diagnostics industry in the UK. Just as our top end manufacturers have joined the national effort to build ventilators, so our life sciences companies will do the same for testing. UK pharmaceutical giants which do not have a tradition of diagnostics are now working with our world leading but smaller diagnostics companies to scale our British diagnostics industry. This new national effort for testing will ensure we can get tests for everyone who needs them.

Taken together, these five pillars represent a comprehensive strategy to deliver 100,000 tests per day, by the end of April.

## **Pillar 2 – Commercial Swab Testing**

As the number of patients falling ill due to COVID-19 increases, so too does the number of staff unable to work in our NHS and elsewhere. Staff self-isolating due to COVID-19 symptoms or a household member displaying symptoms are doing the right thing. But we know that some of those in isolation do not have COVID-19 and may be able to return to work safely. That is why, under Pillar 2 of our strategy, we are rapidly expanding our testing capacity, working hand-in-hand with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and across the regions in England with partners delivering services on the ground.

Our objective is simple: to ensure that those who can return to work safely are able to do so, quickly. In the fight against this pandemic, every single person delivering public services matters, and we need them now more than ever.

There are three main parts to Pillar 2:

- 1) **Drive through test sites:** We have already completed over 10,000 tests through this route across our network of 16 different tests sites. Over the next three weeks, we will expand this to up to 50 test sites right across the UK. A full list of the locations for the sites can be found below.
- 2) **Rapid response:** We will set up 'satellite' test sites for areas where there is a consistent need for more testing, for example in a hospital. This is already underway

in our new NHS Nightingale hospital in London. In addition, we will deploy 'pop up' testing facilities where there is an immediate pressure on public services.

- 3) **Home delivery:** We are testing whether we can deliver test kits directly to people's homes, which will enable those who can't or don't want to drive to a test site. We expect the results of this trial in the next week and we will rapidly scale this up if the trial is successful.

This document provides answers to the most commonly asked questions about Pillar 2.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### SECTION ONE – FOR THOSE WHO ARE BEING TESTED

#### **1. What is the purpose of being tested?**

Getting tested is important to understand if you, or a member of your household, have COVID-19, so that you will know what steps to take to look after yourself, protect others and know if you are fit and well to return to work. It is a potential way you can reduce the amount of time you have to self-isolate.

Testing does not to replace your clinical care, if you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, or your symptoms do not get better after seven days, then use the NHS 111 online coronavirus (COVID-19) service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.

#### **2. How do I know if I am eligible for a test?**

Right now, we are testing NHS key workers who have symptoms of COVID-19 and are following government guidelines on self-isolating and members of an NHS key worker's household, who has symptoms of COVID-19, and the NHS key worker they live with is following government guidelines and self-isolating.

#### **3. When and why are household members tested?**

If a NHS or social care worker is self-isolating because a person they live with has symptoms, they have to isolate for 14 days (unless they also develop symptoms). By testing the household member, we can be much more certain that the NHS or social care worker should either be self-isolating or can come to work.

#### **4. Can my child get a test?**

Some of our tests are appropriate for use on children. These are currently only available in some areas and we are working to make these tests available across the country.

#### **5. How does the appointment system work?**

If you have been referred to be tested, then you will be contacted by your employer and receive a confirmation email of your appointment. This will have all the information you will need: it will tell you what to do, where to go and what you need to bring with you (which includes your employee ID and the confirmation email).

As soon as you inform your line manager of your absence, they will submit the request for your test. It is vitally important that you inform your line manager of your absence as soon as you or a member of your households shows COVID-19 symptoms so that the test can be arranged as soon as possible.

**6. Can you only get a test if you work for the NHS?**

Initially testing was focussed on those working in the NHS. We have started to offer testing to more key workers, including social care workers and police officers and **those currently eligible will receive more information about testing from their employers**. We will continue to expand this to the wider community over time.

**7. Where will I have to go to have my test done?**

We are developing several different options. At the moment, you will most likely be asked to attend a regional test site (further detail below). NHS staff may be asked to go to an NHS site such as a hospital.

**8. What will the test tell me?**

The test will confirm if an individual who is showing symptoms of the disease actually *has* it. It will not confirm whether they *have had* it and have now recovered.

Like any diagnostic test, there is always the possibility of a false negative or a false positive result. If you received a negative result you can return to work immediately, but only if you are well enough. If a household member's test comes back negative you can return to work, but self-isolate straight away if you develop symptoms.

**9. When is the right time to get tested? The first day I feel ill or do I have to wait?**

There is no need to wait for your symptoms to develop further once they have started, the test is designed to be used on anyone who is symptomatic. If your test result is negative, but you have the same symptoms as a family member who has tested positive, you should not return to work for seven days.

**10. How does the test work?**

The test involves taking a swab of the nose and throat. A single swab is used to collect a liquid sample from the back of your throat and your nose. This sample is then placed into a sample tube and securely packaged, where it is sent to the lab for testing. Depending on where you get tested, you will either have a clinically trained member of our team take your swab or be asked to do it yourself.

**11. Does the test hurt?**

You may experience some mild discomfort and you may feel a gagging sensation, but it should not hurt.

**12. How long does the test take?**

This will depend slightly on the person, but it is a quick process and is usually completed within a matter of minutes.

**13. When and how will people receive their results?**

When you take your test, you will be told how your result will be passed to you. This may be by email or by text or both. We are aiming to return results within 48 hours of the test.

**14. Who do I contact if I don't understand my test results?**

Please refer to the communication you have received from your employer (for NHS staff, this will be your NHS contact).

**15. What do I do if I haven't received my test results?**

You should continue to apply the national guidance on self-isolation while waiting for your result. If you have followed this guidance and your self-isolation period has completed, you can return to work.

Please refer to the communication you have received from your employer (for NHS staff, this will be your NHS Trust). We are in the process of establishing a call centre to deal with queries and will provide further information in due course.

**16. If I test negative, and then later I develop symptoms, can I get tested again?**

Yes. Your employer may refer you multiple times to be tested.

**17. If you previously tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) and have another episode of symptoms, do you need to self-isolate again?**

If your first illness was so severe you were prioritised for a coronavirus (COVID-19) test and the result was positive, you will probably have developed immunity to coronavirus (COVID-19). Your new symptoms are very unlikely to be due to coronavirus (COVID-19) and therefore you and your household do not need to isolate.

However, if another person in your household develops symptoms and they have not previously tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19), then they need to isolate along with all other members of the household except for you (as you have already tested positive). If you are concerned about your new possible coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms (a new, continuous cough or a high temperature), use the 111 coronavirus service or call NHS 111.

**18. Why don't you have a digital method of booking tests?**

The testing programme was set up at pace, in order to start getting people tested as soon as possible. We are in the process of developing a digital method for booking tests and receiving results, which we hope to introduce shortly.

## SECTION TWO – FOR THE EMPLOYER OF THOSE WHO ARE BEING TESTED

**19. Can I get staff in my organisation tested?**

Right now, we are focussed on testing self-isolating NHS and social care staff, and symptomatic members of their household. If you have not been approached by the Department for Health and Social Care, then your staff will not yet be eligible. However, we are looking to roll out to wider groups in the coming days.

**20. Who can I send for testing?**

If you are an eligible employer, then you can send any self-isolating member of staff, and they may bring up to three symptomatic members of their household.

**21. How many employees can I send for testing?**

You will be told by the programme team how many places are available.

**22. If an employee has tested negative, can they come back to work straight away?**

Yes, provided other household members have not tested positive and there has been no changes in the employee's health (i.e. new COVID-19 symptoms).

**23. Will I be told if a member of staff has tested positive for COVID-19?**

At present, the programme does not return the results to an employer. It is the individual's responsibility to communicate their own, or their household member's, test result to their employer. Following feedback from the NHS, we are reviewing what information can and should be made available to employers. We will update this document if the position changes.

**24. Can NHS contractors and part time staff be tested?**

Yes, decisions on key staff to be tested will be for the NHS and social care employers and will be made on the basis of critical need. Contractors and part time staff will be included.

**25. How can I contact the programme team?**

The Department for Health and Social Care's programme team can be reached on [opshub@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:opshub@dhsc.gov.uk)

SECTION THREE – REGIONAL TEST SITES



Regional Test Site, fully operational at the Boots Campus, Nottingham



Close up image of the outdoor protected area the patient will drive through



**26. What is a regional test site?**

The Government is working with private sector partners to establish up to 50 regional test sites at locations across the country. These regional test sites are being used to test frontline staff for COVID-19, as part of the Government's wider national testing programme. They are being set up in lots of different types of places, such as car parks of major retailers and airports, where there is space and good transport links.

**27. How long will the regional test site be set up for?**

The regional test site network is being established at pace to deal with the urgent need for COVID-19 testing. It will remain in place for as long as it is required.

**28. Who is running the test sites?**

The regional test sites are part of the Government's national testing programme. There are a several organisations who are working in partnership with the Department for Health and Social Care to set them up and operate them. Partner organisations include:

- Boots
- Deloitte
- G4S
- SERCO
- Sodexo

We are hugely grateful to all partner organisations for their invaluable contributions to this programme.

**29. As Boots are involved in testing, does this mean I can get a test at my local Boots store?**

Boots are providing trained staff to provide testing at the specially established regional test sites. The sites operate a drive-thru model. You need to drive to the site and you (and members of your household if they need to be tested) will remain in your vehicle throughout the process. This helps to contain the virus and reduce the risk of passing it to the others at the test sites. **Boots are not providing testing in their stores.**

**30. How many people can be in the vehicle?**

A maximum of four people can be tested in a car. Each person will need to be sat next to the window. If a fifth person is sat in the back middle seat and are flanked, they cannot be tested.

**31. Where are the regional test sites?**

At 12 April 2020, the following 16 regional testing sites are open in the following locations:

- Nottingham

- Chessington
- Wembley
- Greenwich
- Manchester Airport
- Belfast
- Glasgow Airport
- Gateshead
- Edgbaston
- Haydock
- Cardiff
- Plymouth
- Gatwick Airport
- Leeds
- Stansted Airport
- Aberdeen Airport

### **32. How far will people have to travel to get to the test site?**

We are seeking to establish sites with a broad geographic coverage across the country and aim that no one called to attend should have to drive more than 45 minutes to get there.

### **33. When will a regional test site open in my area?**

We are opening new test sites across the UK each day, with the aim of having up to 50 opened by the end of April. To make sure we are reaching as many front-line staff as we can, these test sites will be set-up in locations where there is the greatest need and where we can reach a large number of key workers in the region. Unfortunately, given the pace at which sites are identified and sites constructed, we are unable to give much advance notice of when or where new sites will be precisely located.

### **34. Are the military helping with these sites?**

The Armed Forces stand ready to help as we level up testing capacity. They are supporting the NHS across the country, distributing ventilators and PPE, constructing Nightingale hospitals and training to drive ambulances. More than 20,000 troops are at readiness to help the country fight the coronavirus. They are ready to help in whatever way they can.

## **SECTION FOUR – RAPID RESPONSE**

### **35. What are the satellite sites doing? Are they part of the regional test sites?**

As part of Pillar 2, we are developing several options for agile delivery of test kits to where they are needed. As part of this, we have been trialling a few 'satellite' test sites, which are being opened up in line with NHS demand. Like the regional test sites, they operate by

appointment only. All testing sites across the country are being used to test NHS and some other key workers only, with appointments managed through employers.

## SECTION FIVE - HOME TESTING

### **36. When will I be able to order a home kit?**

We are currently looking into the possibility of delivering test kits to the homes of key workers who are self-isolating, either because they have symptoms or someone in their household has symptoms. We will provide further information in due course.

## SECTION SIX – TESTING FOR NON-NHS KEYWORKERS

### **37. I work in social care. Can my family and I get tested?**

The rapidly expanding network of regional testing centres being set up around the UK are increasingly offering tests to those who work in social care. Care homes will be contacted directly by the Care Quality Commission with details of available appointments.

### **38. What about other key workers, such as the Police, or Prison Officers? When can they get tested?**

Testing as many Frontline NHS and Social Care staff that need it is our top priority. Where spare capacity becomes available, we have offered testing to together critical key workers such as prison officers and frontline Police.

Over the coming weeks we will be increasing the scale of testing at much greater rates – to reach thousands more health and care staff – and to also cover critical key workers in other sectors. We will confirm the key worker prioritisation process as soon as possible.