

Testing Demand and Capacity Update – For LAs, DPHs, local NHS leaders

All – we wanted to give you a further update specifically on testing, along with some key messages to deliver to people in your area.

As you are aware, we have record capacity for PCR swab tests. However, we have seen unprecedented demand for testing recently. NHS Test and Trace figures show that between mid-June and the end of August the number of people getting tested for the first time rose by 63% and we have seen demand for testing increase significantly again this week.

People with symptoms absolutely must come forward to get a test as this will help us stop the spread of the virus. As we manage this period of high demand, it is especially important that if individuals don't have symptoms, and have not specifically been advised to take a test, they should not be coming forward for a test **because they could be taking a test away from someone who really needs it.** A recent survey at testing sites suggests around a quarter of people who have accessed tests did not have symptoms.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have vastly expanded the nation's testing capacity, more than doubling the capacity of the NHS and PHE laboratories as well as setting up an entirely new nationwide network of testing sites and new Lighthouse laboratories to process samples. This rapid expansion of testing capabilities has led to the creation of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities in British history. [The latest data published](#) shows the UK is currently doing more testing than other comparable countries – for every 1,000 people we are testing 2.54 people each day, whereas Germany tests 1.88, Spain tests 1.91, and France tests 1.89. Our [testing capacity as of 2 September](#) is 249,937 (pillars 1,2 and 4) which is a record high. These numbers will be updated again tomorrow.

We continue to expand capacity even further and to help ensure that testing is being used by those who need it most:

- Over the last fortnight we have increased our testing capacity by over 10,000 tests a day and further increases are already happening this week
- Clear and improved messaging in all our channels and at sites that testing is for those who have symptoms.
- [Announced a new Lighthouse Lab in Charnwood, near Loughborough](#), which follows rapidly on from opening another new Lighthouse Lab in Newport, and there will be further expansions to come. We are also opening more walk-in testing sites to make it easier for people in urban areas to get tested. We now have 72 local sites which has increased from 23 at the start of August.
- [Piloting new technology](#) to further boost capacity.
- Monitoring infection levels across the country so higher volumes of testing are targeted where they are needed most.

We would be extremely grateful if you could also reinforce the below messaging to your audiences:

For the public:

- The main symptoms of coronavirus are: **a high temperature, a new, continuous cough and a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste.** Most people with coronavirus have at least 1 of these symptoms.
- If you have Covid-19 symptoms, get a test. It's really important that anyone with Covid-19 symptoms can get a test. This will help us stop the spread of the virus. If you don't have Covid-19 symptoms and you are trying to book a test, do not come forwards for a test – **you could be taking a test away from someone who really needs it.** This is increasingly important as we head into Autumn and Winter and more people will get colds and the flu. Only if you have one of the 3 symptoms should you book a test.
- Do not stockpile tests – we have plenty of stock and if you develop symptoms in future you will be able to book a test. There is no need to order a test in case of future use.
- If someone in your household starts to have symptoms, then that person must get tested and the rest of the household should self-isolate with them whilst they wait for the results. If you or other members of the household don't have symptoms, then you should not get a test – only people with symptoms should get tested. The vast majority of people who are tested in person get their results the very next day. [Full guidance on self-isolation is available on gov.uk.](#)
- If you are self-isolating or in quarantine, then a negative test result does not mean you can end isolation early. The virus can take time to develop and so a test early on does not prove that you won't go on to develop the virus. That means you could still be at risk of spreading the disease to other people.
- If you have symptoms and need to book a test, you can do this online or by ringing 119. We have been seeing more people trying to ring 111 about testing but we need to make sure that 111 is protected for people who are ringing about other medical and health issues.

For Schools:

- Schools have been issued with [guidance on testing](#) and the advice for parents and teachers. It is very important that this guidance is followed. Schools should not advise pupils or teachers to take a test unless they exhibit one or more of the listed symptoms. If there is a confirmed case then schools should not advise entire classes or year groups to get tested. Only those with symptoms or those advised by their clinician or Local Authority should get a test. Schools must not require students to provide evidence of a negative test before letting them back to school.

We also want to reassure you that against this backdrop of increased demand we are continuing to prioritise **Care Home Testing**, where we are issuing more than 100,000 tests a day to care homes across the country.

We have met our 7 September target of providing testing kits to all care homes for older people and people with dementia who have registered for regular retesting kits. In addition, all other care homes have been able to place orders for test kits from 31 August. So far, over 2,000 specialist homes have registered for test kits. Where an outbreak has been identified, we test all staff and residents as a priority, with all those who test negative being tested again 4-7 days later.

We will carry on keeping you updated and thank you in advance for your continued support. We are very grateful for your partnership in our ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic.