

500,000 daily testing capacity reached in ongoing drive to boost test and trace

- UK testing capacity increased to 519,770 to help meet demand over the winter period, in ongoing expansion of testing
- this follows announcements of new Lighthouse Labs and partnerships joining the lab network
- rapid testing innovations will further boost testing capabilities

As a result of partnerships with NHS and university labs, new cutting-edge testing innovations and a recruitment drive boosting the UK's coronavirus diagnostic network, NHS Test and Trace has rapidly expanded testing capability ahead of winter.

In order to meet the unprecedented scale of challenge this pandemic presents, the government has built a national coalition of people and organisations – from national and local government, the NHS, Public Health England, the military, academia, epidemiology, the private and not-for-profit and community sectors – to create a massive scale testing and tracing programme.

Health and Social Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I am so grateful to the teams who have worked tirelessly over the past few months to meet this milestone, building the UK's daily coronavirus testing capacity to 519,770. More testing means more cases of coronavirus are identified, helping break chains of transmission and stopping this disease spreading.

NHS Test and Trace is a crucial weapon against this virus – but it's no silver bullet. As cases are rising, everyone must continue to play their part by following new restrictions and advice of NHS Test and Trace if they are contacted.

The government's commitment to increasing testing capacity has seen the number of labs across the UK's growing diagnostic network grow through a combination of public, private and academic partnerships.

More than 3,000 new recruits have joined the lab network since April, while advances in innovation and technology continue to speed up processing and add to capacity.

Since the first UK test site opening at the end of March, more than 600 test sites are now in operation across the UK, with up to 40 new test sites opening every week, making the median distance people are now travelling to a test centre just 2.8 miles. The government is committed to continue expanding the capacity of the network of UK test sites and laboratories to make it even

easier to get tested and reduce the time it takes to receive test results.

A critical part of the government's testing efforts is the use of new technologies and innovations, deployed in ways that will have the most impact in protecting people at risk, finding the virus and enabling life to get back to as normal as possible.

As the Prime Minister has outlined, we have started a number of pilots across schools, universities and workplaces to assess the use of rapid lateral flow antigen tests. This is in addition to ongoing pilots in Southampton and Salford using the LAMP no-swab saliva test and LAMP asymptomatic testing for NHS staff.

In addition to these pilots, last week new Primer Design Rapid Turnaround PCR tests were rolled out across 86 NHS Hospitals, which will provide 34,000 tests to patients each day.

NHS staff have received training to use the tests within hospitals, which can deliver results within 90 minutes. The new tests will help to further strengthen the coronavirus response this winter, arming both clinicians with the ability to identify COVID-19 cases quickly and ensure the most appropriate care for patients.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

Thanks to thousands of people working around the clock we have built the largest diagnostic network in British history and we are processing tests at an unprecedented scale.

As we set out to do, we exceeded our aim of 500 testing sites and reached our target capacity of 500,000 by the end of October. But we will not stop. We will continue to expand capacity to improve test turnaround times, push forward testing innovations to make sure anyone who needs a test can get one.

Our first line of defence from coronavirus is washing our hands, wearing a mask and keeping our distance. I urge everyone to remember this and follow guidance provided by NHS Test and Trace to protect our loved ones as we move into winter.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

To respond to the coronavirus we have built a major testing and tracing system from scratch in five months, and we are constantly working to expand and improve it with new technologies and innovations.

We are working tirelessly to make sure everyone who needs a test can get one, including by bringing in new labs that can process

tens of thousands of tests a day, opening new test sites, and trialling new rapid tests that will give results on the spot.

At the same time as expanding NHS and PHE capacity as quickly as possible, the government has set up a growing network of Lighthouse Labs in partnership with a variety of suppliers including NHS Trusts, commercial suppliers, and not-for-profit organisations, in order to process test samples from an entirely new network of testing sites across the UK and from new routes such as home testing and mobile units. This new network of laboratories is in addition to NHS/PHE laboratories.

We have 5 Lighthouse Laboratories operating across the UK (Milton Keynes, Alderley Park, Glasgow, Cambridge and Newport). We have additional Lighthouse Laboratories in Charnwood, Newcastle, Brant's Bridge and Plymouth coming online over the coming months.

In addition to the growing Lighthouse Lab network, we have partnership agreements with Randox in Northern Ireland and a range of public, private and academic sectors.

More partnership agreements with the public, private and academic sectors will see capacity grow by tens of thousands of tests in the coming months. The University of Birmingham, Health Services Laboratories in partnership with University College London, Imperial College London, Queen Mary University of London and King's College London, will all also join the nationwide effort to increase capacity by tens of thousands over the winter.

Maximum capacity is classed at around 85% in order to ensure that the system will operate safely and reliably – this approach aligns with other health and care systems.

There can be a negative impact on turnaround times if labs operate at, or near, maximum capacity. To give our labs headroom to operate efficiently we have rapidly expanded our capacity, opening new laboratories around the country, allowing us to work towards a utilisation rate that will support improving turnaround times while still processing more than a million test a week.

Read more [information on labs](#).

On 16 October, the Prime Minister announced the [launch of test pilots in schools, universities and the NHS](#)