

COVID-19 rapid testing made easier for partially sighted people

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has launched a new service making it easier for partially sighted people to use lateral flow tests in their home.

The service has been launched following an ongoing partnership between UKHSA and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), the Macular Society, Thomas Pocklington Trust, Visionary and Be My Eyes app, to help make testing more accessible.

The Be My Eyes app connects people with low to moderate vision with agents from 119 through a live video call. Users can now benefit from live video assistance from NHS Test and Trace staff to help guide them through how to order, use the tests and register their test results.

UKHSA chief executive Dame Jenny Harries said:

Rapid testing continues to play a vital role in combating the spread of COVID-19. This important new service will help make it easier for partially sighted people to use rapid tests in the comfort of their own home.

Mike Wordingham, Policy Officer for the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), said:

Since early on in the pandemic, RNIB has been working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to improve the accessibility of at-home tests with more than 100 blind and partially sighted people involved in exploring solutions.

We are pleased the Be My Eyes app will enable thousands more people with sight loss to connect with live video assistance to carry out tests as it is vital this happens to enable people to keep themselves and their communities safe. We look forward to continuing the work to ensure testing is made accessible to all, including through the provision of the new instructions in braille, audio and large print formats.

Colin Daniels, the Macular Society's working age and young people's service manager, said:

We know lateral flow testing at home has continued to be a struggle for people living with macular disease and they have often had to rely on family or friends to help.

We're delighted to have been a part of this important project to make the tests more accessible for people with sight loss. Access to live video assistance will not only mean they can complete the test when they need to, but they will also receive welcome guidance and reassurance.

Mike Bell, National Public Affairs Lead at Thomas Pocklington Trust, said:

For many blind and partially sighted people working from home, returning to workplaces or accessing leisure and health services, getting regular lateral flow tests has been vital.

This new support service will make it easier for blind and partially sighted people to take tests independently and reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Fiona Sandford, CEO for Visionary, said:

More visually impaired people are able to test for COVID-19 at home, which is a significant step forward.

Will Butler, Chief Experience Officer, Be My Eyes, said:

The lack of accessible COVID-19 testing options puts millions of people in a difficult and dangerous situation. Technology can bridge this gap, and we're proud to provide UKHSA with a secure, reliable channel to reach and serve anyone who needs visual support. We hope other health care providers will follow their example.

UKHSA has carried out trials with volunteers with differing levels of vision to understand the changes that would have the most impact to testing accessibility. Additional new tools are also being introduced for partially sighted people ordering home test kits, including:

- instructions in braille, audio and large print
- an RNIB information line providing a recorded version of the instructions

Those who experience visual impairment or partial sight across the UK can call NHS Test and Trace for visual assistance with taking the at-home lateral flow test directly through the [Be My Eyes app](#).

People can [order lateral flow tests](#) to be posted directly to their home.