

Health Secretary launches biggest diagnostic lab network in British history to test for coronavirus

- This is the first of 3 'Lighthouse Labs' to be set up across the country, dramatically increasing the number of coronavirus tests that can take place each day
- Each lab will have the capacity to test tens of thousands of patient samples each day, prioritising NHS staff to help them return to work

Health Secretary Matt Hancock visited Milton Keynes today to launch the first Lighthouse Lab, a diagnostics facility which has the capacity to test tens of thousands of patient samples each day for coronavirus.

The site in Milton Keynes is the first of 3 mega-labs that will be integrated into the new national testing infrastructure, with new sites being set up each day across the country to take patient samples. This is the first of three Lighthouse Labs to be set up across the country, dramatically increasing the number of coronavirus tests that can take place each day. The labs have taken their name from the PCR testing technology, which uses fluorescent light to detect the virus.

Since rollout began on 24 March, there are now 13 drive-through sites for NHS frontline staff and their families in operation across the UK, helping to provide the labs with patient samples.

Two further Lighthouse Labs will be opened in Alderley Park and Glasgow in the next 2 weeks to further add lab capacity to test swabs for the virus. The testing of NHS staff and their families currently in isolation will continue to be prioritised, allowing those testing negative, or with family members who test negative, to return to work.

The lab in Milton Keynes is already able to test thousands of patient samples each day, and will work with other Lighthouse Labs to automate the testing process with robotics to increase this to tens of thousands over the coming weeks.

A new digital platform is currently also under construction to meet the UK's target of 100,000 tests a day by the end of April. The platform will automate the country's collection of patient samples, supported by world-class, cross-sector British logistics experts, supported by military planners.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We have set the challenge of achieving a 100,000 coronavirus tests a day by the end of the month.

A stream of new testing and diagnostic facilities are being brought

online, and the opening of the first of our new Lighthouse Labs is an historic moment.

Backed by Britain's world-class scientists and industry partners, the opening of Milton Keynes lab today is a crucial step taken in tackling this virus.

National Testing Co-ordinator Professor John Newton said:

The progress made to increase coronavirus testing across the UK in just a matter of weeks is truly remarkable. I am proud to see the country pulling together in unprecedented times to achieve unprecedented things. The Lighthouse Labs will be the largest network of diagnostic labs in British history.

New testing sites are a key part of our 5-pillar plan to scale up testing. We will use the new mega-labs to continue our work to prioritise NHS staff and key workers currently in isolation, helping those without the virus safely return to work.

Last week the Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced the UK government's [5-pillar plan](#) to rapidly scale up coronavirus testing across the UK. The new 5-pillar plan outlines the ambitions to:

- Pillar 1: Scale up swab testing in PHE labs and NHS hospitals for those with a medical need and the most critical workers to 25,000 a day in England by mid to late April, with the aligned testing strategies of the NHS in the Devolved Administrations benefiting from PHE's partnership with Roche through a central UK allocation mechanism
- Pillar 2: Deliver increased commercial swab testing for critical key workers in the NHS across the UK, before then expanding to key workers in other sectors
- Pillar 3: Develop blood testing to help know if people across the UK have the right antibodies and so have high levels of immunity to coronavirus
- Pillar 4: Conduct UK-wide surveillance testing to learn more about the spread of the disease and help develop new tests and treatments
- Pillar 5: Create a new National Effort for testing, to build a mass-testing capacity for the UK at a completely new scale

So far more than 280,000 coronavirus tests have taken place across the UK.

Professor John Newton of Public Health England has been appointed as National Testing Co-ordinator to bring together government, industry, academia, the NHS and many others, behind this national effort to better understand how the virus is spreading.

The Lighthouse Labs are being actively supported by pharma companies GSK and AstraZeneca, who are providing access to data and resources to further increase their capacity as they scale up at record pace. An extensive supply

chain of resources is being established to bring further resources to these facilities as they become operational and scale up.

The new Lighthouse Labs have been constructed through a partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, Medicines Discovery Catapult, UK Biocentre and the University of Glasgow. Their development is being closely supported by both NHS and Public Health England.