

More rapid COVID-19 tests to be rolled out across England

- Next stage of partnership between NHS Test and Trace and local directors of public health will enable increased testing of priority and high-risk groups in local communities on a weekly basis
- Increase in asymptomatic testing will help pick up more cases, stop the spread of the virus and support communities and critical industries

Over half a million rapid-turnaround lateral flow tests will be sent out by NHS Test and Trace to local public health leaders this week, signalling the next phase of the government's plan to expand asymptomatic testing for COVID-19, the Prime Minister announced today.

Test kits will be issued to over 50 directors of public health across England this week, to enable local teams to direct and deliver community testing based on their local knowledge. Each will receive a batch of 10,000 antigen lateral flow devices as part of a new pilot to enable them to start testing priority groups.

Directors of public health will determine how to prioritise the allocation of these new tests, based on the specific needs of their communities, and will determine how people in the local area are tested. They will be supported by NHS Test and Trace to expand testing programmes in their area through access to training and clinical and operational guidance.

This initial 600,000 batch will then be followed up with a weekly allocation of lateral flow antigen tests. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has now written to all upper-tier local authority leaders, confirming that all directors of public health will be offered this weekly allocation, equivalent to 10% of their population. This will build on the existing partnerships between NHS Test and Trace and local leaders.

Directors of public health were prioritised for the first phase of rapid community testing based on the local prevalence of COVID-19 and expressions of interest to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Any director of public health who wants to start rolling out local testing using lateral flow tests can do so by contacting DHSC.

Proactively testing asymptomatic individuals will help identify those who unknowingly have the virus and enable those who test positive and their contacts to self-isolate, which can help drive down the R rate locally and save lives. This is crucial to break the chains of transmission of the virus and to support critical industries, key workers and institutions. With lower rates of transmission, those at highest risk from the virus will be more protected and residents will feel more confident in getting back to their day-to-day lives.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, said:

Last week we rolled out mass testing in Liverpool using new, rapid technology so we can detect this virus quicker than ever before, even in people who don't have symptoms. Mass testing is a vital tool to help us control this virus and get life more normal.

I am delighted to say 10,000 of these tests will now be sent out by NHS Test and Trace to over 50 directors of public health as part of our asymptomatic testing strategy. I want to thank all directors of public health for their support and efforts over the past months to help us tackle this virus, bring it under control and get the country back to what we love doing.

This rollout will further develop the evidence base for how testing with fast, reliable COVID-19 tests can be delivered at scale. Local leaders will also benefit from a more accurate picture of the number of cases in their area, by picking up those who may not have symptoms, supporting local decision-making to manage the spread of the virus and support their communities.

This innovative new testing technology – which is already being rolled out as part of whole-city testing in Liverpool that began on Friday – can provide results within an hour without needing to be processed in a lab.

Liverpool has set up 16 testing sites for asymptomatic testing, a number of mobile test units and is delivering a significant number of home testing kits across the city.

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

I am delighted that as part of our expansion of testing we are able to partner with local authorities to deliver these new rapid turnaround tests to our local communities. Building on national capacity of 500,000 tests a day, we are now moving to the next stage of testing tailored around the individual needs of local areas with control in the hands of local directors of public health.

There has been a huge amount of work to develop these new testing capabilities and I want to thank colleagues across NHS Test and Trace, Public Health England and the wider scientific community for ensuring that we are one of the first countries in the world who are able to deploy these new tests for the benefit of our public.

Anyone who tests positive must self-isolate along with their household immediately and their contacts will be traced. Eligible individuals who test positive – and contacts who are required to self-isolate – will be entitled to the [£500 Test and Trace Support Payment](#) in the same way as a regular swab test ordered through NHS Test and Trace.

Those who test negative will need to continue to follow all national guidance.

Today's announcement follows the [Prime Minister's commitment on 16 October](#) that lateral flow antigen tests would soon be made available to directors of public health in England for them to direct and deliver an expansion of asymptomatic testing in line with local priorities.

The government has also committed to providing the Devolved Authorities with an allocation of lateral flow tests as they are made available, as part of UK-wide collaboration to stop the spread of the virus. Eligibility and deployment of testing in devolved administrations will be determined by the respective administrations.

NHS Test and Trace is already working closely with local authority leaders to tailor testing to local need. This includes agreeing the sites of mobile testing units and local (walk-in) test sites, surging in testing to support outbreak management and in managing regular testing in care homes. This deeper partnership with local authorities builds on this with NHS Test and Trace providing the tests, clinical and operational expertise, designs of test sites and protocols and creating a best-practice network to share learning across local areas and with the national team.

Lateral flow antigen tests are a new kind of technology that could be used to test a higher proportion of asymptomatic people, better enabling us to identify and isolate more people who are at high likelihood of spreading virus, and break the chain of transmission.

Lateral flow devices do not require a laboratory to process the test. Swabbing and processing of these tests must currently be conducted at a dedicated testing site by trained personnel. The devices are designed to be intuitive and require minimal training to operate, and we are looking at how this test could be self-administered.

The devices will be issued to directors of public health in the following local authorities:

- Barking and Dagenham
- Bexley
- Birmingham
- Blackburn and Darwen
- Blackpool
- Bolton
- Brent
- Bristol
- Bury
- Calderdale
- Camden
- City of London
- County Durham
- Coventry
- Darlington

- Doncaster
- Dudley
- East Riding of Yorkshire
- Enfield
- Essex
- Gateshead
- Greenwich
- Hackney
- Halton
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Hartlepool
- Hertfordshire
- Kingston upon Hull
- Islington
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Kingston upon Thames
- Knowsley
- Lambeth
- Lewisham
- Luton
- Manchester
- Middlesbrough
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- Newham
- North Tyneside
- Northumberland
- Nottingham City
- Nottinghamshire
- Oldham
- Redbridge
- Redcar and Cleveland
- Richmond upon Thames
- Rochdale
- Salford
- Sefton
- South Tyneside
- Southwark
- St Helen's
- Staffordshire
- Stockport
- Stockton-on-Tees
- Sunderland
- Tameside
- Tower Hamlets
- Trafford
- Wakefield
- Waltham Forest
- Wandsworth
- Warrington
- Wigan
- Wirral

- Wolverhampton

Stoke on Trent, Liverpool and Lancashire have already been provided with lateral flow tests before this week.