

NHS Test and Trace managing record number of cases

With more than 30 million tests now processed since the programme was launched, and more than 1.4 million people reached by our contact tracers, NHS Test and Trace is helping to protect lives, and keep our schools and workplaces open.

1,892,703 tests were processed during the week 15 to 21 October, an increase of 163,138 compared with the previous week, and the highest number to date. With more than 600 test sites already in operation across the UK, and up to 40 new test sites opening every week, the median distance people are now travelling to a test centre is just 2.8 miles.

Turnaround times for tests have seen an improvement since the previous week, with 82,000 more in-person tests (pillars 1 and 2) turned around in 24 hours and care home turnaround times continuing to improve. A continued drive to improve testing capacity, which has already seen capacity increase to more than 445,000 a day this week, will contribute to ongoing improvement in turnaround times over the coming weeks.

Meanwhile, the contact tracing service is dealing with record volumes of cases. More than 97,000 people who tested positive were reached and asked for their contact details, that's 80.5% of the total number of people transferred into the contact tracing system. This is a 23% increase in the number of people who tested positive and were contacted by NHS Test and Trace compared to last week – 7 times more people were reached and asked for their contact details than the first week of September.

There are more close contacts being identified than ever before, with an increase of 12% this week alone. For those where communication details were available, 74.3% were reached and asked to self-isolate.

The weekly statistics from the 21st week of NHS Test and Trace show in the most recent week of operations (15 to 21 October):

- a total of 1,892,703 tests were processed, a 9% increase from the previous week
- 97,014 (80.5%) people who tested positive and were transferred to the contact-tracing system were reached and asked to provide information about their contacts, compared with 78,903 (81.7%) the previous week
- 171,554 (74.3%) contacts where communication details were given were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 152,495 (75.1%) the previous week
- 46.5% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 33.4% the previous week
- 20.0% of in-person test results were received within 24 hours after the test was taken, compared with 12% the previous week
- 34.9% of satellite (care home) tests results were delivered within 48

hours compared to 20.4% in the previous week

Since NHS Test and Trace launched, nearly 1.5 million contacts have been identified, and 80.9% of all contacts where communication details were given have been reached and told to self-isolate.

Latest figures also show that the NHS COVID-19 app has been downloaded more than 19 million times since it was launched.

The government's commitment to increasing testing capacity has already seen the number of labs across the UK's growing diagnostic network rise from 5 to 18, through a combination of public, private and academic partnerships.

A new Lighthouse Lab has also now been approved in Plymouth, which is set to join the network in the new year. When fully operational, the Plymouth lab, which will be operated by University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust, will have the capacity to process up to 40,000 COVID-19 tests each day. Nearly 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.

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

As the number of cases rise, we are seeing NHS Test and Trace processing more tests and reaching more people than ever before.

We are expanding the reach of our service and improving performance in key areas such as turnaround times for tests as we continue to increase capacity, but we recognise there is more to be done. We are working hard to meet these increased demands whilst improving the service we offer to the public.

There has been a terminology change. The terms 'complex' and 'non-complex' for cases and contacts will no longer be used. Instead, 'cases and contacts that are managed by local health protection teams (HPTs)' and 'cases and contacts that are not managed by local HPTs' will be used.