

NHS Test and Trace reaches one million people over new year, as record numbers test positive

- A record one million people were reached by NHS Test and Trace contact tracers during the reporting week
- A record 683,124 contacts of people who tested positive were reached by NHS Test and Trace during the reporting week
- The Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme is extended until 31 March
- The number of mobile testing units will double to 500, with new and improved vehicles able to store twice the number of tests

More than one million people were contacted and told to self-isolate during the first week of 2021 – people who might otherwise have gone on to infect others. This means that 92.7% of contacts, and 86.6% of those who tested positive, were reached over the new year week. This is an increase of 48% (331,758 more) compared with the previous week.

As many more people are being reached and told to self-isolate, the government is extending the [Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme](#) until the end of March 2021. The scheme provides £500 payments to people who are told to self-isolate but are on a low income, cannot work from home and risk losing earnings, making it easier for people to adhere to self-isolation requirements.

People can also have confidence that if they have symptoms and need a test, they can get one. NHS Test and Trace's vastly expanded test site network now has more than 800 test sites in operation, including 432 local test sites. The median distance travelled for a test is just 2.4 miles, compared with 5.1 miles as recently as September.

To add to this, a fleet of 500 new and improved mobile testing units (MTUs) will be hitting the streets this week. MTUs were first introduced in April 2020 and they have carried out over 4.3 million tests to date. Over the past 9 months, MTUs have been the first at the scene at a significant number of outbreaks and critical moments, including testing hauliers in Dover and supporting the mass testing pilot in Liverpool.

The new vehicles offer twice the daily testing capacity of the original model, with the ability to store 1,000 test kits compared with the original's capacity of 500. This, combined with the doubling of the fleet's numbers overall from around 250 to 500, will significantly increase the testing capacity offered by the UK's mobile testing capability.

Alongside the existing symptomatic testing service, NHS Test and Trace has stood up a significant programme to pilot new testing technologies to proactively test individuals without symptoms and to improve the service's detection of positive cases.

This follows last week's announcement that the community testing offer is being expanded across all local authorities in England to test people without symptoms.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

NHS Test and Trace is delivering an essential and impressive service. It is truly extraordinary that a service that was only established last spring could now have contacted more than one million people in a single week, telling them to self-isolate and protect those around them. Although the rates of infection are continuing to rise, there can be no doubt that the rates would have increased by much more if NHS Test and Trace had not tested the 2.6 million people it provided tests to, or contacted such a large proportion of those who tested positive. I want to pay thanks to the efforts and dedication of everybody involved.

While our testing capacity continues to grow as part of the government's winter plan, NHS Test and Trace is also deploying hundreds of thousands of rapid tests to identify asymptomatic cases. Around 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 don't display symptoms, meaning you can infect others unknowingly. It is therefore crucial that we continue to follow public health guidance, and all play our part by following the rules and reducing our social contact to slow the spread of the virus.

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

As cases rise across the country, so the demands on NHS Test and Trace increase. It gives me great pride to see our teams rising to meet that challenge. We are making tests available to anyone who needs one, and reaching a large proportion of those that test positive and their contacts – more than a million this reporting week. Everyone working in NHS Test and Trace and using the service can feel confident that what they are doing is contributing to saving lives and protecting the NHS.

We're not stopping there. We are continually seeking to make the system quicker and easier to use. A fleet of 500 new and improved mobile testing units will be deployed to areas of greatest need, adding to our already extensive network of test sites, while testing capacity in our labs continues to increase, with capacity now at more than 790,000 tests per day.

In total during the week of 31 December to 6 January, 1,019,253 people who had either tested positive or were a recent close contact of someone who had tested positive were reached and told to self-isolate.

Over the past months, the government has put in place the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. More than 58 million tests have been conducted in the UK so far and more than 6 million cases and contacts have been reached and told to self-isolate by contact tracers.

NHS Test and Trace now has the capacity to carry out more than 790,000 tests per day, compared with 2,000 just 9 months ago.

Launched on 28 September 2020, the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme is administered by lower-tier and unitary authorities in England, with an initial £50 million of government funding for local authorities to cover the cost of administering the scheme.

To ensure people continue to have access to the support they need to stay at home, and reduce the transmission of COVID-19, the government is now providing an additional £20 million to local authorities to cover the cost of the scheme. This includes an additional £10 million to enable local authorities to continue making discretionary payments to people who fall outside the scope of the main scheme, but who will still face hardship if required to self-isolate.

Testing

As of 6 January, more than 58 million tests have been processed in the UK in total since testing began, more than any other comparable European country.

For this reporting period, turnaround times for test results have remained consistent with the previous week, with 62.9% of in-person test results returned the next day after the test was taken, compared with 63.0% the week before. 94.7% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours. This has remained broadly consistent since NHS Test and Trace began.

The NHS Test and Trace laboratory network processed samples as normal with the same level of capacity, including on bank holidays, to ensure continuity of service.

Tracing

Tracing performance has remained high with 86.6% of cases and 92.7% of contacts reached last week. The proportion of contacts reached within 24 hours as a proportion of those reached is 97.3%.

388,257 positive cases were transferred to contact tracers between 31 December and 6 January, 86.6% of whom were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 85.8% the previous week.

Between 31 December and 6 January, a record 736,939 people were identified as recent close contacts, with 95.9% of those with communication details provided reached and told to self-isolate. Since Test and Trace launched, 87.5% of close contacts for whom communication details were provided have been reached.

Background information

The [weekly statistics from the 32nd week of NHS Test and Trace](#) show in the most recent week of operations (31 December to 6 January):

- the proportion of contacts reached by tracing service remains consistent at 92.7%
- 86.6% of people who tested positive and were transferred to the contact-tracing system were reached and asked to provide information about their contacts, compared with 85.8% the previous week
- 95.9% of contacts where communication details were given were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 96.0% the previous week
- 62.9% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 63.0% of tests the previous week (England only)
- 94.7% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours, compared with 93.6% the previous week
- 31.5% of in-person test results were received within 24 hours after the test was taken, compared with 33.0% the previous week
- 86.8% of satellite tests were received within 3 days, compared with 79.9% the previous week