

NHS Test and Trace service to strengthen regional contact tracing

- NHS Test and Trace will provide local authorities with a dedicated team of contact tracers for local areas
- Local and national teams will work as one to ensure that as many people as possible are reached by contact tracing
- Approach has already been successfully used in Blackburn with Darwen, Luton and Leicester and is now being offered to all local authorities

NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England (PHE) will extend its partnership with local authorities in order to reach more people testing positive and their contacts to stop the spread of COVID-19, the government has announced today.

This new way of working will give local areas dedicated ring-fenced teams from the national service. These dedicated teams of NHS Test and Trace contact tracers will focus their work on specific areas, alongside the relevant local public health officials to provide a more tailored service.

If the dedicated national team cannot make contact with a resident within a set period of time, the local public health officials can use the data provided by NHS Test and Trace to follow up, which in some pilot areas has involved local authority teams and voluntary partners visiting people at home.

This integrated national and local system combines specialist local knowledge with the additional resources and data required from NHS Test and Trace. It has already been successfully used in Blackburn with Darwen, Luton and Leicester and is now being offered to all upper tier local authorities who are responsible for public health locally.

All data will be fed into the same system by both the national and local teams to ensure there is a complete view of how the service is working and how the virus might be spreading.

Executive Chair of NHS Test and Trace, Dido Harding, said:

NHS Test and Trace is one of the largest contact tracing and testing systems anywhere in the world, and was built rapidly, drawing on the UK's existing health protection networks, to stop the spread of coronavirus. At the height of the pandemic we ensured the system had extra capacity in place to cope with potential peaks in the virus.

We have always been clear that NHS Test and Trace must be local by default and that we do not operate alone – we work with and through partners across the country. As we learn more about the spread of the disease, we are able to move to our planned next step and

become even more effective in tackling the virus.

After successful trials in a small number of local areas, I am very pleased to announce that we are now offering this integrated localised approach to all local authorities to ensure we can reach more people in their communities and stop the spread of COVID-19.

Councillor James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association, said:

This announcement is good news for everyone. A strong national and local partnership is critical for test and trace to work as effectively as possible and it is right that local resources are kept under constant review to ensure everyone involved is able to help stop the virus spreading further.

Using councils' unrivalled local knowledge and vast experience of contact tracing within local public health teams is vital in the government's national efforts.

As the approach becomes more locally targeted the national service will adjust. NHS Test and Trace will reduce current extra capacity and reduce the number of non-NHS call handlers.

Data on the virus continues to be actively monitored through PHE and the Joint Biosecurity Centre so that staff numbers can be quickly scaled up, or down, depending on requirements for the national service and as part of winter preparations. This will continue to be determined by detailed forecasting of calls, informed by the experience of the service, the spread of the virus and citizen behaviour. As a result the national service will move from 18,000 to 12,000 contact tracers on 24 August with remaining teams to be deployed as part of dedicated local Test and Trace teams.

Staffing numbers of NHS clinicians who advise people who have tested positive will remain at current levels and can also be expanded further if required. And staffing has already been increased in PHE's local health protection teams, who have doubled in size and will increase this further ahead of winter.

More localised testing also continues to be rolled out, with over 200 mobile testing units already in operation and over 200 walk-in centres to be open across the country by October. In areas of high prevalence NHS Test and Trace supports local areas with even more testing as required.

This announcement builds on the recently published [Contain Framework](#), which sets out how national and local partners will work together at a local level to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks, and [NHS Test and Trace's business plan](#) which were both published in July.

NHS Test and Trace and PHE will continue to work with local authorities to

continuously improve the service provided to local residents.