

PHE novel coronavirus diagnostic test rolled out across UK

The novel coronavirus diagnostic test developed by Public Health England (PHE) is being rolled out to laboratories across the UK starting on Monday 10 February 2020. The increase in diagnostic capacity from one laboratory in London to 12 labs over the coming weeks, will accelerate the country's testing capabilities.

The UK was one of the first countries outside China to have assured testing capability for the novel coronavirus. At PHE's laboratories in London, it has the capacity to process samples from more than 100 people a day.

Now, to ensure that the country is prepared for further cases and to speed up the time from a sample being taken to a result in the lab, the test will be carried out by trained scientists across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This increases testing capacity to more than 1,000 people a day for England.

When a clinician suspects novel coronavirus, they take samples from the nose, throat and deeper respiratory tract and send them for laboratory testing.

Using the diagnostic test, scientists can look for evidence of the presence of any type of coronavirus and then hone in on specific genetic clues that identify the novel coronavirus associated with this outbreak.

A confirmatory test will continue to be conducted at PHE's Colindale laboratories.

Professor Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director, Public Health England, said:

Once China confirmed that they had identified a novel coronavirus, Public Health England was ready to test potential cases in this country. We have now trained scientists in labs across the UK to conduct the specialist test – ensuring that we are well prepared should we begin to see an increased number of cases across the country.

The roll-out to other parts of the UK is the fastest deployment of a novel test to PHE and NHS labs in recent history, including in the Swine flu pandemic in 2009.

In addition to processing samples from suspected cases in this country, PHE is now working as a reference laboratory for WHO, testing samples from countries that do not have assured testing capabilities.

The laboratories are in the following locations:

- Scotland (2 laboratories)
- Northern Ireland
- Wales
- London
- Cambridge
- Birmingham
- Bristol
- Manchester
- Leeds
- Newcastle
- Southampton