

Regular asymptomatic testing paused in additional settings

- Routine asymptomatic testing will be paused across remaining settings, including hospitals and care homes, from 31 August as Covid cases continue to fall
- Testing for individuals with symptoms in these settings, including health and social care staff, will continue
- Immunocompromised patients in hospitals and people being admitted into care homes and hospices will also continue to be tested

Regular asymptomatic testing for Covid in all remaining settings in England will be paused from 31 August, as Covid cases continue to fall.

Free testing for the public ended on 1 April as part of the government's Living with Covid plan, but asymptomatic testing continued to be used in some settings during periods of high case rates.

The vaccination programme means Covid cases have now fallen to 40,027 and the risk of transmission has reduced. Deaths have fallen to 744 and hospitalisations to 6,005 in the last seven days, meaning wider asymptomatic testing can soon end as planned in most instances. Symptomatic testing in high risk settings will continue.

Settings where asymptomatic testing of staff and patients or residents will be paused include:

- The NHS (including independent health care providers treating NHS patients);
- Adult social care and hospice services (apart from new admissions);
- Parts of the prison estate and some places of detention; and
- Certain domestic abuse refuges and homelessness settings.

Testing will remain in place for admissions into care homes and hospices from both hospitals and the community, and for transfers for immunocompromised patients into and within hospital to protect those who are most vulnerable.

Testing will also be available for outbreaks in certain high-risk settings such as care homes.

Year-round symptomatic testing will continue to be provided in some settings, including:

- NHS patients who require testing as part of established clinical pathways or those eligible for Covid treatments;
- NHS staff and staff in NHS-funded independent healthcare provision;
- Staff in adult social care services and hospices and residents of care homes, extra care and supported living settings and hospices;
- Staff and detainees in prisons; and
- Staff and service users of certain domestic abuse refuges and

homelessness services.

Individuals will continue to be protected through vaccination and access to antivirals where eligible.

The government continues to encourage all who are eligible to take up boosters. Autumn boosters will be available to book through the National Booking Service ahead of the wider rollout, due to start on the 12 September. The NHS will contact people when it is their turn.

Health and Social Care Secretary Steve Barclay said:

Thanks to the success of our world-leading vaccination roll-out, we are able to continue living with Covid and, from 31 August, we will pause routine asymptomatic testing in most high-risk settings.

This reflects the fact case rates have fallen and the risk of transmission has reduced, though we will continue to closely monitor the situation and work with sectors to resume testing should it be needed. Those being admitted into care homes will continue to be tested.

Our upcoming autumn booster programme will offer jabs to protect those at greatest risk from severe Covid, and I urge everyone who is eligible to take up the offer.

Dr Susan Hopkins, Chief Medical Adviser to the UK Health Security Agency, said:

Covid case rates and hospitalisations are on the decline, demonstrating the positive impact of the vaccines, which remain our best form of defence. The data from our surveillance shows prevalence is low and decreasing, and we will continue to monitor this data closely.

If you are invited to receive a booster jab in the autumn, or if you have not yet had a Covid vaccine, please do take up the offer to protect yourself and those around you.

The government expects the prevalence of Covid to remain low following the most recent wave but will keep the situation under review. In line with the Living with Covid plan, the government will continue to work closely with sectors and services and will be ready to resume testing if required.

Guidance on testing in adult social care settings will be updated today (24 August) and guidance on other high-risk settings will follow shortly.

On 15 August, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published its advice on which vaccines should be used in this year's Autumn

booster programme. This includes the approval of new dual-strain (or “bivalent”) vaccines as part of the programme, targeting both the original strain of the virus and the new, more prevalent Omicron strain.

All of the available boosters provide good protection against severe illness from Covid and the Committee has emphasised that getting a booster in good time before the winter season is more important for those eligible than the type of vaccine that is received.

Background: