

Second rapid testing pilot starts at Southwark Crown Court

- Government-backed rapid testing pilot to run for four weeks at Southwark court
- Partnership supports national workplace testing programme run by NHS Test and Trace to help protect people most at risk
- Findings will determine how rapid testing could be rolled out to courts and tribunals nationally

From this week, and for the next four weeks, lateral flow tests will be offered to people attending a scheduled hearing at Southwark Crown Court who are not showing any symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). The test will be offered to all staff, judiciary, jurors, contractors, legal professionals, and professional court users who visit the site. It will not be a public testing facility.

The opening of this rapid testing pilot site follows the [first pilot](#) that started in January 2021 at Manchester Civil Justice Centre (CJC). In the first week of testing at Manchester CJC, more than 160 tests were carried out, which were all negative.

Around one in three people who are infected with COVID-19 have no symptoms, so could be spreading the disease without knowing it. Broadening testing to identify those showing no symptoms will mean finding positive cases more quickly and preventing the spread of infection. Each positive result from a rapid test is one that would not have been found otherwise, helping break chains of transmission in our communities and workplaces and protecting those at highest risk.

As with Manchester, the Southwark pilot will support the NHS Test and Trace national testing programme by providing information on how rapid testing works in different public sector settings. HMCTS will use findings to decide how rapid testing could be rolled out nationally to other courts and tribunals across the country.

Kevin Sadler, Acting CEO of HMCTS, said:

“Justice is essential to all those who need it – from vulnerable victims to families in crisis, witnesses and defendants – and courts and tribunals have been operating throughout the pandemic.

“This second rapid test pilot is in addition to a suite of safety measures already in place to keep court visitors safe.”

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

“We’ve already come so far since first setting up a national testing programme at an unprecedented pace to help counter COVID-19, but we continue

to strive to go further, faster.

“Lateral flow tests hold the key to the next phase of our ambition to see rapid testing available to people across the country.

“I’m delighted that HM Courts & Tribunals Service are working with us to use the latest technology in Southwark Crown Court, and I look forward to seeing the fruits of their labour, both in helping target the virus locally, and helping find ways to roll this technology out further.”

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

“The innovation and evolution of NHS Test and Trace continues to improve our detection of positive cases and I am incredibly proud of the speed at which we have been able to roll out these initiatives to protect more people more quickly. This is a national effort and a partnership of public and private sectors is instrumental in our response to this virus.

“Around one in three people with COVID-19 don’t display symptoms, meaning you can infect others unknowingly. This rapid testing programme with HM Courts & Tribunals Service is one of many that will inform our understanding of how rapid asymptomatic testing can be operationalised in the real world to protect those at high risk, find the virus and help us go back to as normal a way of life as possible.”

All Southwark Crown Court users will be given the opportunity to book a test slot. Users will be asked to register their details on the NHS portal using their smartphone or a registered device. The tests being carried out are lateral flow devices. Specially trained staff who manage the testing site will supervise the tests and process the results.

Lateral flow tests used by the UK Government go through a rigorous evaluation by the country’s leading scientists. Tests detect cases with high levels of virus, making them effective in finding infectious individuals who aren’t showing any symptoms and are the most likely to transmit the disease.

The tests are voluntary and detect the presence or absence of coronavirus by applying a swab or saliva sample to the device’s absorbent pad. The sample runs along the surface of the pad, showing at the end a visual positive or negative result dependent on the presence of the virus.

Once the test has been taken, NHS Test and Trace will send results by text or email after about 30 minutes. If the test gives a positive result, the court user will be required to leave the court, return home quickly and directly, and follow NHS advice on self-isolating. Court users are encouraged to contact us, and to let us know as soon as possible if a positive test result is received.

There are practical issues to resolve before any wider roll out of testing in courts and tribunals occurs – not least space, staffing and supply of equipment. We will provide updates as soon as our plans evolve.

Every building we operate – including our [Nightingale courts](#) – meet the government’s COVID-secure guidelines, and public health experts have confirmed our arrangements remain sufficient to deal with the new strain of the virus.

For media enquiries about the mass testing programme please contact the DHSC media centre.

1. England only – Anyone testing positive for the virus in England will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace to help them trace their contacts. This will help people to identify who they may have been in close contact with, protecting others from further transmission. Close contacts of those testing positive will also hear from NHS Test and Trace, asking them to stay at home for 10 days to prevent them from unknowingly spreading the virus.
2. See further information on rapid workplace testing [here](#)
3. See latest testing statistics [here](#)
4. Lateral flow tests used by the UK government go through a rigorous evaluation by the country’s leading scientists.
5. LFDs detect cases with high levels of virus, making them effective in finding individuals who are the most likely to transmit the disease, including those not showing symptoms.
6. Rapid testing has a different, but crucial role to play in the fight against coronavirus, and should not be directly compared to lab-based PCR tests which are available for anyone with coronavirus symptoms. They complement PCR testing (which identifies almost all cases including those with very low viral loads and has capacity to process over 800,000 tests a day) by returning a result almost immediately within 30 minutes and finding positive cases with high levels of virus that are easy to transmit to others.
7. Extensive clinical evaluation from Public Health England and the University of Oxford research shows lateral flow tests are specific and sensitive enough to be deployed for mass testing, including for asymptomatic people. The Oxford University and Public Health evaluation is available [here](#)
8. Rapid testing in the workplace, using lateral flow tests, aims to help protect those at highest risk and provide vital information to help inform further rollout of the rapid testing technology in future. Organisations signed up to workplace testing already include Royal Mail, Tate & Lyle Sugars, Primula, Moy Park, Octopus Energy, Apetito, and DVLA.
9. Hundreds of thousands of these tests are already being carried out every day, with the majority taking place at dedicated test sites for people without symptoms, which can be found in a range of community settings such as universities, schools, care homes and workplaces.
10. Please see words from Chief Medical Adviser for NHS Test and Trace, Susan Hopkins on lateral flow tests: [10 January](#) and [8 December](#)