

Health Secretary sets out plan to carry out 100,000 coronavirus tests a day

The UK will carry out 100,000 tests for coronavirus (COVID-19) every day by the end of this month, Health Secretary Matt Hancock pledged today.

Increased testing for the NHS will form part of a new 5-pillar plan, bringing together government, industry, academia, the NHS and many others, to dramatically increase the number of tests being carried out each day across the UK.

Professor John Newton, Director of Health Improvement for Public Health England, has been appointed to help deliver the new plans and bring together industry, universities, NHS and government behind the ambitious testing targets.

He will co-ordinate a national effort with global manufacturers encouraged to expand their manufacturing capacity here in the UK; our strongest, home grown businesses in life sciences and other industries are encouraged to turn their resources to creating and rolling out mass testing at scale, and the government will support anyone across the UK with a scalable scientific idea or innovation to start a business.

New testing capabilities for the NHS and their families will support staff who are isolating at home to return safely to work if the test is negative, and keep themselves and others safe if the test is positive.

Significant progress to increase testing has already taken place across the country to protect the vulnerable, support our NHS, and ultimately save lives. New testing centres have been established at the main hotspots of the disease, and the UK has already conducted more than 152,000 tests. The 5-pillar plan sets targets to expand the UK's capability further.

The new 5-pillar plan outlines the ambitions to:

- scale up swab testing in PHE labs and NHS hospitals for those with a medical need and the most critical workers to 25,000 a day by mid to late April
- deliver increased commercial swab testing for critical key workers in the NHS, before then expanding to key workers in other sectors
- develop blood testing to help know if people have the right antibodies and so have high levels of immunity to coronavirus
- conduct surveillance testing to learn more about the spread of the disease and help develop new tests and treatments
- create a new National Effort for testing, to build a mass-testing capacity at a completely new scale

Once widespread testing is available, the UK will prioritise repeated testing of critical key workers, to keep them safe and make sure that they do not spread the virus.

Over time, plans announced today will also see increasing focus on testing to see if people have already had the virus, to identify if they have the antibodies that will give them immunity against catching it again. This science is new and developing, but the aim is for a successful test that can be rolled out at scale, that could allow critical workers – and then the wider population – to return to work and their daily lives.

Professor John Newton, Director of Health Improvement at Public Health England, brings with him a wealth of experience from the medical research and epidemiology fields. Professor Newton has worked across the public and private sectors during his career.

NHS to benefit from £13.4 billion debt write-off

- More than 100 NHS hospitals to be rid of historic debt, freeing them up to invest in maintaining vital services and longer-term infrastructure improvements
- Comes alongside new NHS funding model to make sure the NHS has the necessary funding and support to respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

From 1 April, over £13 billion of NHS debt will be scrapped as part of a wider package of NHS reforms announced by the Health Secretary today.

The changes will provide much needed financial support during this unprecedented viral pandemic, as well as laying secure foundations for the longer-term commitments set out last year to support the NHS to become more financially sustainable.

This is part of a package of major reforms to the NHS financial system, designed in a collaboration between the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England, which will begin from the start of the new financial year.

This package is launched in combination with a simpler internal payment system to help NHS trusts in dealing with the coronavirus (COVID-19) response, which was agreed with NHS England last week.

This significant change will mean hospitals will get all the necessary funding to carry out their emergency response, despite many hospitals cancelling or limiting their usual services such as elective surgery or walk-in clinics due to the virus.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

As we tackle this crisis, nobody in our health service should be distracted by their hospital's past finances.

Today's £13.4 billion debt write off will wipe the slate clean and allow NHS hospitals to plan for the future and invest in vital services.

I remain committed to providing the NHS with whatever it needs to tackle coronavirus, and the changes to the funding model will give the NHS immediate financial certainty to plan and deliver their emergency response.

While many NHS trusts manage strong finances, under the existing rules, some took out loans to plug financial gaps in their day-to-day (revenue) or capital (infrastructure) budgets.

107 trusts have an average of £100 million revenue debt each, with the 2 trusts with the highest debts reaching a combined total of over £1 billion.

NHS chief executive, Sir Simon Stevens, said:

We've advocated for and support this pragmatic move which will put NHS hospitals, mental health and community services in a stronger position – not just to respond to the immediate challenges of the global coronavirus pandemic, but also in the years ahead to deliver widespread improvements set out in our NHS Long Term Plan.

Under the new rules set out in a letter to all NHS trusts, should hospitals need extra cash this will be given with equity, rather than needing to borrow from the government and repay a loan.

The letters also include details on every local area's capital budget for 2020/21, providing certainty to the NHS for the new financial year and enabling investment in vital longer-term infrastructure upgrades as soon as possible.

These budgets come on top of the capital facility the government launched in February to ensure the NHS has access to whatever extra capital investment it needs, without charges, to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.

[Debt write-off: breakdown by region](#)

- The debt to be written off at 31 March 2020 consists of a combination of interim revenue debt, which includes working capital loans and interim capital debt. The final principal is subject to validation by providers and audit but stands at £13.4 billion
- These loans will be frozen from 1 April when interest will cease, and

loan principal and outstanding interest extinguished from balance sheets following a transaction during 2020/21

- The debt will be effectively written off by converting the loans to equity (Public Dividend Capital). Adjustments will be made to ensure providers' surplus/deficit positions are not negatively affected by debt write-off. The previous system saw trusts owe the value of the loan plus interest
- The loans that have been historically been issued as "Normal Course of Business" will be retained. These loans were entered into at the option of the provider, confirmed as affordable and continue to operate effectively
- The debt being effectively written off is a transaction within the DHSC group. This will not create additional borrowing or fiscal cost for the Exchequer

[Foreign Secretary: NATO joint action can help to stop coronavirus](#)

NATO Allies can help stop the spread of coronavirus if they take fast, decisive and co-ordinated action now, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab told a meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers today.

In a video-conference, the Foreign Secretary called on Allies to play a pivotal role in overcoming the global threat posed by the virus by working together to boost the resilience of the most vulnerable countries, cooperate on creating a vaccine, take action to support the global economy, and enable our nationals to return home.

The Foreign Secretary told the meeting that NATO's expertise in military planning, resilience and countering disinformation can make a real difference in helping Allies to halt the spread of coronavirus, and praised the work of the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Relief Coordination Centre and NATO troops on the ground.

He joined Allied Ministers in stressing the importance of NATO continuing to deliver its core tasks of deterring threats and maintaining its operations, in order to continue ensuring the security of almost one billion people.

The Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

NATO has a vital role to play in tackling the coronavirus pandemic around the world and I call on NATO Allies to work together to beat this invisible enemy. Our priority must be to develop a vaccine and medical treatments, reinforce the health systems of vulnerable countries, support the global economy and bring our citizens safely

home.

Our collective security – and that of almost one billion people – depends on the health of our people, the strength of our economies and the stability of our neighbours.

The Foreign Secretary also used the meeting to welcome North Macedonia as the newest NATO Ally.

NATO Foreign Ministers today committed to:

- Ensure the Alliance remains active, focused and ready to detect and deter threats to our collective security.
- Protect deployed forces on the ground against coronavirus.
- Support and assist each other in countering disinformation campaigns by state and non-state actors, which seek to undermine public health and the international response to coronavirus.
- Enhance NATO's mission in Iraq by taking on some of the training activities currently conducted by the Global Coalition.
- Enhance NATO support to Georgia and Ukraine.
- Increase NATO's engagement in the Middle East and North Africa
- A Reflection Process to shape the future of NATO's political role; John Bew, the Prime Minister's Special Advisor for Foreign Policy and Defence has been appointed to the advisory group.

Further information

[COVID-19: A Message from the PCA and DPCA](#)

The tied pub trade is coping with unprecedented challenges. Right now, the need to preserve the rights of regulated tenants is a priority. Pubs Code duties on the regulated pub-owning businesses (POBs) are not suspended, and

indeed they provide protections to tied pub tenants which will be important throughout and after the Covid-19 emergency.

However, all regulated pub-owning businesses have told us that given the circumstances they do not expect to be able to comply with their Pubs Code duties to serve compliant Rent Proposals, Rent Assessment Proposals and MRO full responses. These duties are vital in ensuring that rents are fairly set, and that tenants are no worse off than if they were free of tie.

During this emergency we recognise the importance of measures to ensure that the burden of preserving rights, including by bringing timely arbitration disputes to the PCA, should not fall on the tenants where this is not a practical or economic possibility. We are therefore pleased that Directors of all the regulated POBs have signed a formal declaration which serves to protect certain tenant rights in the current emergency.

This declaration effectively stops the clock from 16 March 2020 on many Code deadlines that apply to tenants making arbitration referrals during this emergency period, and provides safeguards relating to specific MRO rights. Please see [here](#) for further detail.

These arrangements provide additional protections and expressly do not prevent any tenant from taking any available Code step to access their rights.

We have consulted with tied pub tenant representative groups about these measures. We will continue to engage with the POBs to ensure that they return to compliant processes as soon as possible, and that tenants can continue to benefit from their Code rights. As regulators all our statutory enforcement powers continue to exist. We will be working tirelessly to promote and protect the Code rights of tenants and will take further measures if these prove necessary.

[6/2020: coronavirus response and updated guidance](#)

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.