

Targeted testing to be offered to children in north east London, Kent and Essex

- Government announces a targeted testing drive for secondary school and college students in parts of north east London, Essex and Kent
- Aims to combat a rapid increase in cases among this age group by identifying asymptomatic cases and helping to break chains of transmission
- Mobile testing units will be deployed and home tests kits will be distributed and staff, students and their families will be urged to get tested this weekend

Cases in London, Essex and Kent have been rising rapidly, with the fastest rates in those aged under 11 to 18 years old.

From today all staff, students and their families in certain schools and colleges will be urged to get tested. Latest figures from the ONS showed almost 1 in 3 people in England show no symptoms of having the virus but are still able to pass it on. Large-scale rapid testing helps identify these asymptomatic cases, driving down infection rates and helping break chains of transmission.

Schools and colleges will be provided with information on how to get involved, and parents or carers will be able to apply for tests using the online testing portal. Children under 16 attending a mobile testing unit (MTU) need to be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

The surge testing capacity will be deployed to help identify as many positive cases as possible, especially those who may be asymptomatic and unwittingly transmitting the virus.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We want to keep schools and colleges open, because it is right both for education and public health, but in the face of rapidly rising cases we must act to target rising rates in secondary school pupils.

From our successes in Liverpool and Leicester we know surge testing is safe, and helps us quickly assess where the virus is spreading most and take action to stop it in its tracks.

I urge every student, parent and teacher in these areas to step forward for testing, irrespective of whether they have symptoms. While COVID-19 may be lower risk to children and young people, it still poses a significant risk to their families and communities. By taking these vital steps, we can get on top of cases and help

bring transmission of this virus under control now.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

This additional testing capacity underlines this government's commitment to ensuring that education is a national priority, because that is in the best interests of students' progress, development and wellbeing.

I would encourage everyone eligible to access the testing and I'd like to thank staff for continuing to ensure that schools and colleges have protective measures in place to reduce the risk of transmission.

Any student, staff or family members who test positive will have to isolate for the required period, and NHS Test and Trace will work closely with Local Authorities to take appropriate measures to support contacts within schools, and carry out necessary contact tracing.

The additional capacity comes thanks to the historic expansion of testing capacity by NHS Test and Trace, which is now able to process nearly 600,000 PCR tests every day and deploy new rapid lateral flow tests.

Children under 12 must be accompanied by a guardian and the test has to be administered by that guardian.

Children 12 to 17 must be accompanied by a guardian and can administer the test themselves.

Children under 12 do not need to wear a face mask.

In London

An additional 44,000 home test kits will be made available for school staff including teachers to test before returning in January.

Additional MTUs will be deployed in or near schools for staff, students and their families to be tested, providing tests over and above existing test sites in the capital.

London boroughs receiving additional testing are:

- Barking and Dagenham
- Hackney and the City
- Havering
- Newham
- Redbridge
- Tower Hamlets
- Waltham Forest

In Essex

An additional 10 MTUs will be deployed tomorrow and over the weekend.

Essex boroughs receiving additional testing are:

- Southend
- Basildon
- Basildon
- Canvey Island
- Harlow
- Brentwood
- Harlow
- Southend

In Kent

An additional 2 MTUs will be deployed tomorrow, with a further 10 MTUs arriving at the weekend.