

# Twice weekly rapid testing to be available to everyone in England

- Everyone in England, including those without symptoms, will be able to take a free rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) test twice a week
- Alongside vaccine rollout, regular testing is at the heart of plans to reopen society and the economy, helping to suppress and control the spread of variants
- Updates will be made to the NHS COVID-19 app in England to coincide with the universal testing offer

Everyone in England will be able to access free, regular, rapid coronavirus testing from 9 April, the Government has announced.

In a significant step forward, which paves the way for businesses and society reopening, anyone will be able to access free, rapid lateral flow tests (LFDs) for themselves and their families to use twice a week, in line with clinical guidance.

Rapid testing has so far been available to those most at risk and people who need to leave home for work, including frontline NHS workers, care home staff and residents, and schoolchildren and their families. Now rapid testing will be offered to everyone, with people encouraged to take regular tests to help prevent outbreaks and reclaim a more normal way of life.

One in 3 people with COVID-19 do not experience any symptoms and may be spreading the virus unwittingly. Rapid testing detects cases quickly, meaning positive cases can isolate immediately. Since rapid testing was introduced, over 120,000 positive cases that would not have been found otherwise have already been identified by LFDs. By making rapid tests available to everyone, more cases will be detected, breaking chains of transmission and saving lives.

Alongside the rollout of the vaccine, regular testing is going to be an essential part of the easing of restrictions as it will help us quickly suppress the spread of variants. Through new testing technology, positive cases of variants of concern are being detected faster than ever before. More people getting a test will increase our ability to identify and control variants.

The NHS COVID-19 app has been breaking chains of transmission to protect users and their communities since its launch in September, with over 22 million people downloading the app to date. Updates will be made to the NHS COVID-19 app in England to coincide with the offer of rapid testing for everyone.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Massive efforts have been made by the British public to stop the

spread of the virus.

As we continue to make good progress on our vaccine programme and with our roadmap to cautiously easing restrictions underway, regular rapid testing is even more important to make sure those efforts are not wasted.

That's why we're now rolling out free rapid tests to everyone across England – helping us to stop outbreaks in their tracks, so we can get back to seeing the people we love and doing the things we enjoy.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Around 1 in 3 people who have COVID-19 show no symptoms, and as we reopen society and resume parts of life we have all dearly missed, regular rapid testing is going to be fundamental in helping us quickly spot positive cases and squash any outbreaks.

The vaccine programme has been a shot in the arm for the whole country, but reclaiming our lost freedoms and getting back to normal hinges on us all getting tested regularly.

The British public have shown over the last year that they quickly adapt and always do what is right in the interest of public health, and I know they will do their bit by getting tested regularly in the months ahead.

## **Getting a rapid test**

Getting a rapid test is quick and convenient. Over 100,000 businesses in England have registered their interest to provide rapid tests to their employees, and the offer of free testing is being expanded to companies with over 10 workers where on-site testing is impossible. The expanded regular testing offer for people without symptoms will be delivered through:

- a home ordering service, which allows people to order lateral flow tests online to be delivered to their home
- workplace testing programmes, on-site or at home
- community testing, offered by all local authorities
- collection at a local PCR test site during specific test collection time windows
- testing on-site at schools and colleges

A new 'Pharmacy Collect' service is also launching which will provide an additional route to regular testing. People aged over 18 without symptoms will be able to visit a participating local pharmacy and collect a box of 7 rapid tests to use twice a week at home.

The best route for testing can be found at [NHS.UK/get-tested](https://www.nhs.uk/get-tested). If testing at

home, individuals will need to register their results online or by calling 119. They should self-isolate if positive and order a confirmatory PCR test.

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should book a test online or by calling 119.

Dr Susan Hopkins, COVID-19 Strategic Response Director at PHE and Chief Medical Adviser to NHS Test and Trace, said:

Rapid testing helps us find COVID-19 cases that we wouldn't otherwise know about, helping to break chains of transmission. These tests are effective in detecting people that are infectious and therefore most likely to transmit infection to others. They are another tool we now have to help maintain lower infection rates.

I encourage everyone to take up the offer of these free rapid tests – they are quick and easy to carry out in your own home.

Recent analysis from NHS Test and Trace shows that for every 1,000 lateral flow tests carried out, there is less than 1 false positive result. LFDs detect cases with high levels of virus and are very effective in finding people who don't have symptoms but are very likely to transmit the disease.

## **NHS COVID-19 app updates**

To coincide with the offer of free rapid testing for everyone, there will be updates to the NHS COVID-19 app in England from 8 April:

### **Everyone in a group must check in**

In line with new regulations, when a group enters a hospitality venue, every individual must check either by scanning the official NHS QR code poster with the NHS COVID-19 app, or by providing their contact details. Previously, only the lead member of the group needed to provide contact details to check in.

### **Venue history sharing**

If an app user tests positive, they will be asked to share their venue history in a privacy-protecting way via the app. This will allow venue alerts to be generated more quickly, and improve the ability to identify where outbreaks are occurring and take steps to prevent the virus spreading.

### **Additional venue alerts**

If a person has been at a venue on the same day as several other people who have since tested positive for COVID-19, they may receive an alert advising them to book a test immediately, whether they are showing symptoms or not. This is to support finding asymptomatic cases who may have caught the virus but are not displaying symptoms.

## **New QR code posters**

There will be new posters displaying QR codes for hospitality venues in England. Work has taken place with the industry to make the posters clearer and easier to use. All venues in England in scope of the regulations are legally required to display an official NHS QR code poster.

### Notes to editors

- A marketing campaign encouraging people to take up the offer of twice weekly rapid testing will start on 9 April.
- The universal offer is currently for England only. The Devolved Administrations make their own policy decisions around testing. If an individual lives in a devolved nation, their guidelines around testing will differ, and the individual should follow testing guidance issued by their nation.
- [Dr Susan Hopkins on confirmatory PCR testing and detecting variants](#)