

COVID-19: concerns about price, reliability and quality of PCR testing

News story

Concerns have been raised about the price and reliability of PCR travel tests and the quality of the service people are getting from PCR test providers.



The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Sajid Javid, wrote to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) on 6 August asking the CMA to consider these issues .

There are 3 areas that the CMA is currently exploring:

1. Whether individual PCR providers may be breaching their obligations under consumer law and should be subject to enforcement action
2. Whether there are structural problems in the market for PCR tests, affecting price or reliability
3. Whether there are any immediate actions that the Government could take in the meantime

George Lusty, CMA Senior Director for Consumer Protection, said:

It is essential that people paying for PCR tests are treated fairly, get what they pay for and that their rights are respected when things go wrong. We will not hesitate to take enforcement action if we find evidence that PCR providers are breaching consumer law.

We are also working closely with DHSC to get the data we need to identify the cause of any wider problems in the PCR testing market, and to ground our advice on what action may be needed.

This is a particularly pressing issue just now for families hoping to enjoy a well-earned holiday after such a difficult year, and for those reuniting with friends and relatives overseas. That is why we are also providing ongoing support to DHSC, including on steps that could be considered in the interim, before the rest of our work on the PCR testing market is concluded.

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[Appeal for local knowledge to achieve tree planting ambitions in York](#)

Press release

The Environment Agency is appealing for help from York residents to decide where new trees should be planted as part of the city's flood defence scheme.



Trees being planted in Dickson Park in the Foxwood area of York last year

The tree planting programme will see 275 trees to be planted across the city this autumn, and the Environment Agency is asking the local community for their views on where they should be located.

When flood defences are being constructed, large amounts of space are often needed to build embankments or move heavy machinery around, sometimes in dense urban areas. This means that in certain situations some trees need to be removed to enable flood defence work to proceed.

In York, everything is being done to minimise the loss of trees and for every one removed, five will be replanted.

Julia James, tree planting project manager at the Environment Agency said:

We're calling on York residents to help identify locations across the city where they'd like to see trees planted, which will help us shape our tree planting ambitions.

We recognise the value of trees in cities and the important contribution they make to ecosystems and biodiversity in urban areas. Trees perform a variety of environmental functions such as absorbing carbon dioxide and rainwater, protecting soils and providing shade. They also make places more attractive and are a key feature in the character of an area, contributing to individual and community wellbeing.

Tree location suggestions can be made [online via the survey](#) or by emailing the team with suggestions at yorkfloodplan@environment-agency.gov.uk by the end of August.

The Environment Agency and City of York Council have both set ambitions to become carbon neutral by 2030. In partnership with the council, the Environment Agency has identified the importance of increasing tree cover in the city as a way of contributing to this goal and have committed to new tree planting where possible.

For more information about the York Flood Alleviation Scheme visit: <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/yorkshire/yorkfas/> and York's five year flood plan: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/york-5-year-flood-plan>

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[International safety rules for High Speed Craft brought into force](#)

Press release

International rules on safety levels for High Speed Craft (HSC) are being brought into force under UK law.



FastCat – a fast ferry operated by Wightlink – approaching Ryde Pier Head Port on the Isle of Wight. Photo credit: Wightlink.

The regulations bring three main changes – additional safety drills and record keeping, opening-up the satellite providers’ market which should reduce costs and introducing an automatic update to any future changes internationally covering HSC.

Vessels covered include such craft as fast ferries and catamaran.

It brings into force the latest changes to the international HSC Codes, which operate under Chapter X (Ten) of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea 1974 (SOLAS).

The new safety standards will require enclosed space entry and rescue drills to be carried out and recorded that they have been done. This is in addition to other drills already legally required such as fire and evacuation ones.

For operators, the opening-up of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) satellite providers’ market, should reduce costs in the longer term.

The final change is to bring in what is known as ambulatory referencing meaning any future amendments to the HSC Codes will be automatically updated in UK law.

Katy Ware, Director of UK Maritime Services, said: “We are committed to making sure every maritime craft and vessel has the right level of safety and it’s important for these rules to be brought into UK law.

“It’s also important that we’ve brought in rules that will automatically update UK law, so that we will always be current with the Codes, whatever changes are made.”

For further information and a chance to provide your views, please see the [The Merchant Shipping \(High Speed Craft\) Regulations 2022 consultation](#).

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Statement on Clarion Housing Association – 12 August 2021

News story

An update on the Eastfields Estate in Merton.



We received a referral from Clarion Housing Association in relation to homes on its Eastfields Estate in Merton. Whilst there were clearly individual repairs issues which required resolution, our investigation did not find evidence of systemic or organisational failure which indicates a breach of the consumer standards.

Notes

- Our remit in social housing complaints is about whether the provider we regulate has breached our [regulatory standards](#).
- Complaints about specific problems or disputes that tenants (or groups of tenants) have with their landlords usually fall within the remit of the Housing Ombudsman.
- Regardless of the source of the information, all referrals to us about social housing consumer issues are considered under the same three-stage process. In this process we consider: whether the issue is within our remit; whether a breach or potential breach of our consumer regulatory standards has occurred; and if a breach or potential breach has occurred, whether it meets the serious detriment test.
- In deciding whether a breach or potential breach of our consumer regulatory standards has occurred, we are looking at whether there has been systemic or organisational failure, for example a systemic

breakdown or failure in the organisation's systems and processes.

- We summarise the lessons that can be learned from our consumer regulation casework each year in our [consumer regulation review](#).

Further information

1. For press office contact details, see our [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.
2. The Regulator of Social Housing promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.

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[Health and Social Care Secretary visits new Megalab](#)

- New megalab has processed almost 300,000 COVID-19 tests in its opening weeks and thanks to our world-leading science and infrastructure and genomic sequencing capabilities is set to play a critical role in the government's ongoing response to COVID-19
- Laboratory set to be major local employer with over 500 staff now employed at the lab, and up to 1,500 new jobs expected in total
- The health and economic benefits of capabilities like this new lab which develops our life sciences sector will help the UK build back better

Over a quarter of a million COVID-19 tests have been processed and up to 1,500 new jobs are being created at a new megalab in Leamington Spa, which

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid and Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Jenny Harries visited today (Thursday 12 August).

They met staff and saw state-of-the-art cutting-edge testing technology in action – including top of the range robotics – at the Rosalind Franklin laboratory which opened on 13 July. The lab is already making phenomenal progress, processing almost 300,000 COVID-19 tests in its opening weeks as part of the NHS Test and Trace network.

The biggest of its kind in the UK, this megalab will rollout pioneering new genotype assay testing in the coming months to help scientists quickly identify known variants of concern, as well as genome sequencing to identify new mutations. This technology is already helping the UK take decisive action to suppress outbreaks as restrictions have been eased, such as deploying surge testing.

The laboratory's name honours Rosalind Franklin, whose legacy includes significant contributions towards our current understanding of RNA sequencing, which is now a major tool in our efforts to combat variants of concern.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

“The new Rosalind Franklin laboratory is bringing together some of the world's leading scientists and large scale, state-of-the-art testing infrastructure under one roof.

“Along with vaccinations, regular testing is playing an integral role in helping us manage this virus and will help ensure we are prepared for future pandemics. This megalab will soon be helping us not only process tests, but also detect the kind of variants that threaten our progress in living with COVID-19.

“The laboratory is also a huge boost for the local area creating employment opportunities and inspiring a new generation into careers in science and technology.” The new laboratory is creating employment for local people, with nearly 500 people on-boarded already and over 500 more joining in the near future, with up to 1,500 jobs expected when the lab is fully staffed. Around 60% of the staff hired so far live within 30 miles of the site.

The Rosalind Franklin Laboratory is providing new opportunities to drive the next generation of biotechnology discoveries investing and developing our expertise in genomics and health data. The Laboratory aims to create and upskill scientists with a programme of training and, with close links to universities, to inspire a new generation to choose a career in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The first cohort of PhD students from the local University of Warwick have begun their placements at the lab as data scientists and bioscience leads gaining hands-on experience on the frontline of COVID-19 testing. The university is working closely with the laboratory to continue developing opportunities for collaboration, including research and professional training.

Investments like the laboratory is just one in a number of significant opportunities for improving healthcare beyond the pandemic putting research as the backbone of health care innovation.

Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Jenny Harries said:

“The newly established UK Health Security Agency has been formed to help protect the UK not only against COVID-19, but from the health threats and pandemics of the future.

“This megalab is going to be right at the heart of our present and future battles against national health threats and it is already arming our exceptional scientists with the right testing and genomics infrastructure to manage the spread of COVID-19.

“As well as helping us combat this virus, our hope is that many of the leading scientists of tomorrow will begin their careers in STEM here at the Rosalind Franklin laboratory in the months and years ahead.”