

Government to launch 40,000 person daily contact testing study

- A new study led by Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace will help increase understanding of how effective daily contact testing could be for people who are contacts of positive COVID-19 cases. It is to be used as an alternative to self-isolation.

Daily coronavirus tests will be given to as many as 40,000 people who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, in a new government-backed study designed to gather evidence on safe alternatives to self-isolation for people who are contacts of positive COVID-19 cases.

If successful, the study – led by the UK Health Security Agency (including Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace) – could provide evidence to help to reduce the length of time people who are contacts of positive COVID-19 cases need to self-isolate, as parts of the economy and society reopen through the Roadmap. A reduction in the period of self-isolation from 10 days could help prevent individuals having to miss work, while allowing people to continue to safely participate in society.

The launch of the England-wide exercise builds on the research pilots taking place in businesses, hospitals and schools. Since December over 200 schools, 180 workplaces and over 800 individuals have participated in daily testing pilots, which have proved effective in reducing the need for people to self-isolate, while detecting cases of Covid-19 that would not have otherwise been found. Participants of pilots have been able to safely reduce the length of time spent in self-isolation upon receipt of a negative daily test result.

Currently, anybody who has been notified through NHS Test and Trace as a contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 must self-isolate for 10 days. For those contacts without symptoms, the new study aims to find out if people can replace the need to self-isolate by taking a test every day instead.

Close contacts of people with COVID-19 will be contacted by phone and sent 7 days' worth of lateral flow tests (LFDs). The contacts are required to test themselves each morning for 7 days. People who test negative and develop no symptoms will be exempt from the legal duty to self-isolate that day and can leave their home to carry out essential activity.

They will need to take another test the next morning to see if they need to self-isolate that day or continue to be exempt. Individuals will still have to adhere to current restrictions, including following the rules on hands, face and space, and only those formally enrolled in the research study will be exempt from usual legal duties.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

With around 1 in 3 people not showing any symptoms, regular testing is already playing a critical role in helping us reclaim our lost freedoms – quickly spotting positive cases, helping identify new variants and squashing any outbreaks.

At every stage of this global pandemic, the British public has stepped up and made huge sacrifices – including self-isolating when they are asked. This new pilot could help shift the dial in our favour by offering a viable alternative to self-isolation for people who are contacts of positive Covid-19 cases, and one that would allow people to carry on going to work and living their lives.

Alongside the phenomenal progress of our vaccination rollout – with over 48 million vaccines administered so far – rapid testing is allowing us to get back to doing the things we all love.

When it launches on Sunday 9 May the study will offer people in England who are identified as a close contact of a positive case the opportunity to take part in the study, providing they do not have COVID-19 symptoms, are above the age of 18 and are not in full-time education.

The aim of the study is to compare two approaches to routine testing of contacts in order to determine the potential for onward transmission. The study will take the form of two randomly split groups, one of which will be given one PCR test and asked to self-isolate for the full 10-day period. The second group of participants will be given two PCR tests and 7 LFDs to test daily.

Ahead of the formal launch, the study is starting to collect evidence now on the effectiveness of daily contact testing while there is still prevalence of COVID-19 in the community.

Professor Isabel Oliver, National Infection Service Director at Public Health England and study lead, said:

We know that isolating when you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 is challenging but it remains vitally important to stop the spread of infection. This study will help to determine whether we can deploy daily testing for contacts to potentially reduce the need for self-isolation, while still ensuring that chains of transmission are stopped.

Contacts of cases are at higher risk of infection so testing them is a very effective way of preventing further spread. This study will play an important part of our evaluation of daily contact testing and how the approach to testing might evolve.

With around 1 in 3 people not showing any symptoms of COVID-19, using regular testing, along with vaccines and social-distancing, are helping us keep

infection rates low as restrictions are eased. Everyone in England is now able to access free, rapid, twice-weekly testing using LFDs. Since rapid testing was introduced, 145,765 positive cases of COVID-19 have been detected that would not have otherwise been found.

Since the end of February, there has been a robust surveillance programme in place and regular testing is helping us understand the level of virus circulating in the community. This daily testing study is part of the government's efforts to control the virus and accelerate the return to a safe, secure normality. Only those formally enrolled in the research study will be exempt from usual legal duties.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Anyone who is identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace as a contact will be offered to take part in the study. This won't include people identified as a contact through the NHS COVID-19 app or through an informal channel. A person will be eligible to take part if they:
 - do not have COVID-19 symptoms
 - live in England
 - are not in full-time education
 - are aged 18 and over
 - are not under the quarantine rules for arriving in England
- People will not be able to take part if they have been informed that they have been in contact with someone who's tested positive with a variant of concern (VOC) or variant under investigation, or within a known workplace or school where a VOC or variant under investigation is circulating.
- The MHRA has reviewed and contributed to the study protocol and is in contact with the Principal Investigator. Following the study, the results will be used to seek MHRA exceptional use authorisation to rollout out self-use LFDs nationally for daily contact testing services.
- On daily contact testing the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) said at its 11 March meeting: "Daily testing approaches may also offer other benefits in some circumstances (for example, fewer days of education missed if used in schools)."
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sage-83-minutes-coronavirus-covid-19-response-11-march-2021>
- Recent analysis by NHS Test and Trace shows lateral flow tests (LFD) have a specificity of at least 99.9%. This means fewer than 1 false positive in every 1,000 lateral flow tests carried out:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-analysis-of-lateral-flow-tests-shows-specificity-of-at-least-999>

- At times of low prevalence, the probability of a positive test result from a LFD being a false positive is higher, so we are mitigating this by asking people to confirm a positive LFD result with a PCR test: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-reintroduces-confirmatory-pcr-testing>
 - Everyone in England can now access free, twice-weekly rapid testing: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/twice-weekly-rapid-testing-to-be-available-to-everyone-in-england>
 - Rapid COVID-19 tests effective if part of wider strategies, BMJ analysis paper states
 - A British Medical Journal (BMJ) paper analysing rapid testing for COVID-19, co-authored by University of Liverpool academic Professor Iain Buchan, reviews how rapid testing technologies such as PCR and lateral flow tests can be most appropriately used to support different COVID-19 testing strategies. <https://news.liverpool.ac.uk/2021/02/03/rapid-covid-19-tests-effective-if-part-of-wider-strategies-bmj-analysis-paper-states/>
 - Please see words from Chief Medical Adviser for NHS Test and Trace, Susan Hopkins on lateral flow devices:
 - All testing policy is kept under continuous evaluation.
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[Surge testing to be deployed in Tower Hamlets](#)

Press release

Everyone aged 11 years and over who lives, works or is educated in postcode E1 is strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 PCR test when invited



Working in partnership with Tower Hamlets Council, NHS Test and Trace is providing additional testing and genomic sequencing in targeted areas within E1 postcodes from Sunday.

It follows the identification of multiple confirmed cases of the variants

first identified in South Africa (B.1.351) and Brazil (P1).

All the confirmed cases are self-isolating. There are no links between these cases and the cluster of cases recently identified in South London.

If you are over 11 years of age and you live, work or are educated in an E1 postcode, you're strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 PCR test when invited, even if you're not showing symptoms.

Enhanced contact tracing will be used for individuals testing positive with a variant of concern (VOC). In these instances, contact tracers will look back over an extended period to determine the route of transmission.

By using PCR testing, positive results can be sent for genomic sequencing at specialist laboratories, helping us to identify VOC cases and their spread.

If you have symptoms, you should book a free test online or by phone so you can be tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent to your home. If you do not have symptoms, you should visit the local authority website for more information.

People in this area should also continue using twice-weekly rapid testing alongside the PCR test as part of surge testing.

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[UK and Jordan Trade Agreement comes into effect](#)

The new Association Agreement reaffirms the deep interest of both Jordan and the UK to strengthen our longstanding trade and economic relationship.

The total trade on goods and services between the UK and Jordan was worth £561 million in 2020, which we will seek to expand.

We have had positive trade agreements and partnerships across a variety of sectors including education, aviation, retail, biometrics and technology.

Major items exported to Jordan include: general industrial machinery, mechanical power generators, vehicles, medicinal and pharmaceutical products. UK imports from Jordan include mechanical power generators, vegetables, metal ores, clothing and general industrial machinery.

As stated during the London Initiative in 2019, the UK priority is to promote investments, growth and jobs for Jordan. We are working with the Jordanian government to overcome some of the structural issues that prevent greater FDI

into Jordan. We are supporting and promoting Jordan's Public-Private Partnership Unit's work and the National Infrastructure Projects that were prioritised by the Government of Jordan.

Welcoming the agreement, the UK's Minister for Middle East and North Africa, James Cleverly said:

As we celebrate 100 years of friendship, it continues to grow and flourish. Today's new UK-Jordan trade agreement is an important step forward for our countries, which will provide a boost to British and Jordanian businesses.

Building stronger trade links and attracting more investment will grow our economies and help both our countries build back better from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Background

The Jordan-UK Association Agreement was signed on 5 November 2019. A Jordanian Royal Decree was issued on 25 February 2021 and the Jordanian government confirmed on 1 March that all their procedures been completed.

The UK Statutory Instrument was laid before Parliament on 24 March and the UK Government informed Jordan on 25 March that all UK procedures have now been completed. In line with the terms of the Agreement, this will enter into force on May 1, 2021.

[Foreign Secretary boosts BBC funding to fight fake news](#)

- Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announces multi-million pound uplift for BBC World Service
- Funding will help to tackle harmful disinformation and inaccurate reporting around the world and enhance its digital offer
- This follows the UK Government's Integrated Review, which underlined the need to fight disinformation to protect the UK against state threats

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has today (1 May) announced £8 million of new funding for BBC World Service projects to tackle harmful disinformation, challenge inaccurate reporting around the world and improve digital engagement.

Funding will support the BBC World Service's investigative journalism, expanding the reach of its work to report in an unbiased and impartial way. This follows the success of their "Reality Check", "Africa Eye" and "Arabic

Investigations” programmes, which have challenged fake news around the world.

The new package will also help to build international audiences, improving the digital platforms available to people in countries such as India, Kenya and Nigeria.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

In a world where states and criminal gangs twist the news to exploit others, it is vital to safeguard independent and objective news reporting around the world.

This new funding will allow the BBC World Service to take impartial journalism to many more people around the world, by countering those who distort the truth to mislead the public.

This new support comes shortly after the publication of the Government’s Integrated Review, which underlined the need to fight disinformation to protect the UK against state threats. Today’s announcement will help support efforts to counter those.

Some states are using internet bots to push out disinformation on social media platforms, such as spreading fake news around the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in harmful content, that is often shared widely by tens of thousands of people on social media.

This includes encouraging scepticism around vaccines or in some cases prime-time news outlets in some states are blaming the US for artificially creating – and profiting from – the pandemic.

Welcoming the announcement, BBC Director General Tim Davie said:

We welcome this investment in the World Service which builds on the significant results achieved since the funding programme began in 2016.

Through this partnership, the World Service has achieved an all-time record audience of 351m, in 42 languages including English, with the BBC’s global News services now reaching 438m every week.

More than a third of the total BBC News global audience – 151m – access BBC News digitally and this additional support will enable us to further strengthen our digital offer and tackle global disinformation.

As the world continues to fight the Covid pandemic, the positive role of the World Service in providing trusted, impartial news has never been more critical.

The funding announced today comes on top of previous funding for the BBC’s

World2020 programme from the FCDO since 2016, which has meant impartial news is available in 12 additional languages. The additional support has helped increase the service's international reach by 40 per cent to 351 million people each week, including across Asia and Africa.

Notes to editors:

- The £8 million package, announced today is for 2021/22 and will go towards the BBC World2020 Programme to promote accurate, impartial news around the world.
- This additional £8 million brings the total FCDO funding for the World2020 Programme to £94.4 million. The £8 million consists of £3million to tackle disinformation and a further £5 million to reach further audiences and improve digital engagement.
- Since 2016, the FCDO has invested over £378 million via the World2020 Programme, which has contributed towards a 40% increase over four years in weekly audience reach across World Service channels to 351 million people a week, in particular in India and across Africa.

[UK-Viet Nam Joint Statement](#)

News story

Joint Statement on the United Kingdom-Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement Entry into Force



1. The UK and Viet Nam have a strong and growing bilateral trade relationship and share a strategic commitment to global trade, the free flow of capital and investments. Today marks an important symbolic step in this partnership as the UK-Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement enters into force. Between 2011 and 2020, Viet Nam's share of total UK trade doubled. The Free Trade Agreement covers £5.1bn in trade and provides a platform to grow trade and investment, as well as certainty to UK and Vietnamese businesses. Trade in goods ranging from clothing and footwear

to seafood and pharmaceutical products can continue uninterrupted.

2. The Free Trade Agreement secures access to staged tariff reductions between the UK and Viet Nam. The deal locks in the 65% of all tariffs that have already been eliminated on UK-Viet Nam trade. This will increase to 99% of tariffs after six years. This includes eliminating tariffs for UK exporters of machinery, mechanical appliances, and pharmaceutical products. The preferential tariffs of the FTA will provide identical opportunity for Viet Nam to increase exports of key products such as phones and components, garments, footwear, and fish to the UK. Viet Nam continues to receive duty-free tariff quotas for its 14 products, including rice, with improved market access.
3. Under the Free Trade Agreement, trade in services can continue to flourish. Viet Nam has not only opened additional sub-sectors for UK service providers, but also made commitments deeper than those outlined in the WTO – offering the UK favourable access to Viet Nam’s market. Sub-sectors that have higher commitments under the agreement include financial services, telecommunications, and education services.
4. On Intellectual Property Rights, both sides continue to commit to a high level of protection. Iconic British products, including Scotch whisky, Scottish farmed salmon, Irish whiskey and Irish cream, as well as 36 of Viet Nam’s agricultural products, including Moc Chau tea, Buon Ma Thuot coffee, Hai Hau rice and Phu Quoc fish sauce, continue to be protected.
5. The UK-Viet Nam FTA also maintains access to public procurement markets in Viet Nam, so that UK firms have more opportunity to bid for public procurement contracts.
6. It also serves as a stepping-stone towards the UK’s membership of Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a priority for the UK. Viet Nam supports and welcomes the UK’s application for accession to the CPTPP. This will bring us closer to the CPTPP’s vision of advancing economic integration and supporting the liberalisation of trade and investment globally.
7. Today is the latest milestone in a year of strengthening bilateral and trading relations between the UK and Viet Nam and follows the signing in September of a refreshed bilateral Strategic Partnership Agreement, which will sit alongside and complement the FTA. The UK is committed to deepening its engagement in the Indo-Pacific, including as an energetic and dependable partner in the growing prosperity of the region, and in this Viet Nam will be a key partner.