

Statement from Vaccine Deployment Minister Nadhim Zahawi on vaccine deployment

Britons will again be cheered by the news that yet another vaccine has been approved for use in the UK.

Friday's authorisation of the Moderna vaccine for (coronavirus) COVID-19 means we will, by spring, have 3 safe and effective vaccines to use.

A vaccine was always going to be our best way out of this pandemic; that's why so much effort and planning has gone into our vaccination programme.

Some 1.5 million people have got the jab already and this number is accelerating rapidly.

Tomorrow we're launching our full vaccine deployment plan – the culmination of months of preparation and hard work by the NHS, the Armed Forces, and local and regional government at every level.

The basic principle that sits behind it is to save as many lives as possible, as quickly as possible. It's also essential we reduce hospitalisations from this disease, so we can reduce the pressure on our NHS.

To achieve that, we have an ambitious plan to protect our most vulnerable groups first, because they account for more than 4 out of 5 COVID deaths. We want to offer the vaccine to the top 4 most vulnerable groups by the middle of February.

It's ambitious, but I'm confident we can do it, not least because we are drawing on the strengths of 2 of this country's most treasured assets: the NHS and our Armed Forces. We're in safe hands.

Working together, day and night, they will ensure our vaccines are going into arms rather than sitting on shelves. UK forces will use techniques borne out of decades of experience of getting things done in some of the toughest conditions imaginable. They'll bring the bravery and brilliance they shown in places like Iraq and Afghanistan to these shores.

By the end of this week, we will have over 1,000 GP-led vaccination sites up and running, as well as 223 hospital sites, 7 giant vaccination centres and the first wave of 200 community pharmacies. It means it won't be too long before we can expand our programme down the priority list and more of us can get the jabs, using our new National Booking service to make appointments.

It's an exciting time, but I recognise it's also a frustrating time because we're not there yet. We're still living under some tough restrictions and the disruption that comes with them. But as our heroes set out on this vital national mission, we can all play our part by sticking to the rules and

remembering those simple steps: hands, face, space. That way their success will be our success and we can come out of this together.

Statement from Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock on testing and vaccinations

We begin 2021 knowing that vaccines are our way out of this pandemic. Human ingenuity and phenomenal scientific advances make it a case of when, not if, we will return back to normal life.

The cavalry is here courtesy of our vaccination programme and we have already protected more people through vaccinations than any other European country.

Alongside this pivotal work, we must not lose focus on our system of testing, which we know is another important weapon in our fight against this virus, and can bring down the R number by between 0.3 and 0.6.

Over the past months, we have been regularly testing our colleagues in health and social care and those working in critical infrastructure, to give them peace of mind and to keep them and their colleagues safe.

We have also been doing community testing in the areas where prevalence is highest to help find more cases sooner and we currently have over 400 sites in community centres, village halls and places of worship across the country.

This targeted approach has yielded results, picking up a proportion of cases that's above the national average and allowing us to bear down hard on the virus in a local area.

Today I am thrilled to announce that testing for those who do not have symptoms will be available to every local authority in England, and working closely with devolved administrations, so every corner of the UK can benefit from this life-saving work.

This expansion comes at a critical time. We recently had to introduce difficult but vital restrictions to deal with a highly transmissible new variant of coronavirus.

As a result, millions of people are working from home, reducing their social contact to slow the spread of the virus.

But we know that millions of workers, who work in warehouses or construction sites or who keep vital services going, are not able to do this. So we will be asking local authorities to target this testing programme at those who

cannot work from home and who have to leave home during lockdown, providing them with another layer of protection and helping us to drive down the spread of the virus.

Many large employers, like John Lewis and Royal Mail are already piloting regular workforce testing. As we expand our capacity, we want more rapid testing available to those who can't work from home, and NHS Test and Trace will work closely with other government departments, employers and local authorities to make this happen.

This critical national infrastructure for testing will be so important as we ease restrictions, so we can use the confidence provided by accurate testing to find the virus and help us return to normal life.

One of the greatest breakthroughs in our testing programme was the use of lateral flow devices, which can pick up infectious cases and turn around rapid results.

So far, most of these tests have been shipped in from abroad, but we now have signed a contract with SureScreen Diagnostics, based in Derby, to deliver the first lateral flow tests here in Britain to be approved by Public Health England.

Two million of these rapid tests, which provide results within 30 minutes, have already been manufactured, with the first batch of one million due to be delivered by the end of this week.

This is great news for our country, not only because it allows us to test more people, but also allows us to boost British industry and further enhance our world leading life sciences sector.

While we deliver our vital programmes for testing and vaccines, using the best of human ingenuity to keep us safe for the long-term, we must all play our part and follow the rules that we know can bend the curve.

If we do this, then we know that 2021 will be a year of recovery, and a year when this nation gets back on its feet once more.

Statement from Chief Medical Adviser for NHS Test and Trace, Susan Hopkins on community testing

Press release

Chief Medical Adviser for NHS Test and Trace, Susan Hopkins, on the

importance of testing those without symptoms.



We now know that around one in three people who have coronavirus never show any symptoms but that does not mean they are not infectious.

We need to use everything at our disposal to find these individuals without symptoms and support them and their contacts to isolate in order to break the chains of transmission.

That is why the community testing offer is being expanded to all local authorities with a particular focus on workplace testing. This expansion will help keep workers safe by finding those who are infectious while protecting vital services and supporting employers to ensure their businesses to operate. Community testing plans are designed by local authorities and supported by national infrastructure. Directors of Public Health with their detailed local knowledge and data can ensure that the tests are targeted to have the greatest impact.

Community testing will use lateral flow devices (LFDs) to test for coronavirus (COVID-19). These devices, which can give a rapid result in under 30 minutes without the need for laboratory testing, can help identify people who have high levels of virus and no symptoms who would not otherwise be coming forward for a test.

Moreover, because these tests detect cases with high levels of virus, they are effective in finding individuals who are the most likely to transmit the disease. Every positive individual detected can break a chain of transmission once these individuals and their contacts isolate for 10 days. Local authorities can support individuals who need to isolate by providing help with shopping, collecting medicine from the pharmacy and other vital services.

An increase of asymptomatic testing will help find more cases and support critical industries. Increased asymptomatic testing will allow those playing essential roles to keep the country moving.

Lateral flow devices alone aren't a silver bullet for stopping the spread of the virus but we know they can help detect large numbers of positive cases quickly. They are another vital tool to help us combat coronavirus.

Statement from Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Whitty on national alert levels

Press release

Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty writes about the UK's battle with Covid-19.



We have faced several grave moments during our battle against coronavirus. But right now, the country is perhaps facing the most serious yet.

The new, more transmissible variant of this disease is spreading rapidly across the country and having tragic consequences. On Monday the 4 UK Chief Medical Officers and the NHS Medical Director recommended raising the national alert level to the maximum of level 5 for the first time. This means that without further action there is a material risk of our healthcare services being overwhelmed within 21 days. Since then the situation has deteriorated further.

Hospitals are always busy in the winter but the NHS in some parts of the country is currently facing the most dangerous situation anyone can remember. If the virus continues on its current trajectory many hospitals will be in real difficulties, and very soon. This means that the time people wait for care will continue to increase to potentially unsafe levels, hospitals won't have room to take redirected emergency cases in regional networks, staff to patient ratios which are already stretched will become unacceptable even in places like intensive care. There will be avoidable deaths. NHS staff are doing their absolute best, and working remarkably; we all owe them a huge debt of gratitude, but even they have limits.

The public have made an extraordinary effort so far. Of course we are all tired of restrictions, but we need to find the collective strength to get through this critical stage and save as many lives as we can. The advice

right now is unambiguous: to drive the numbers down, we must stay home except for work, exercise and essential activities. Every unnecessary interaction you have could be the link in a chain of transmission which has a vulnerable person at the end.

These restrictions will not last forever. Science has delivered new vaccines, drugs and tests, with more on the way, in record time. People will be reunited. Vaccines and new treatments offer us hope and a clear way out. But we are not there yet, and should not act as if we are.

We still have weeks to go before vaccines will start reducing COVID deaths and, some weeks later, the number of people being hospitalised. We cannot afford to let our justified optimism for the future come at the expense of difficult action today. That means for now staying home and avoiding all unnecessary contacts. By following the rules, we will save lives and help normal life return more swiftly.

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[Asymptomatic testing to be rolled out across the country starting this week](#)

- Local authorities will be encouraged to target testing to people who cannot work from home during lockdown.
- Around 1 in 3 people have coronavirus (COVID-19) without displaying any symptoms.

Rapid, regular testing for people without symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) will be made available across the country from this week, with the eligibility of the community testing programme expanded to cover all 314 lower-tier local authorities.

Local authorities will be encouraged to target testing at people who are unable to work from home during the national lockdown.

Expansion of asymptomatic testing will identify more positive cases of COVID-19 and ensure those infected isolate, protecting those who cannot work from home and our vital services. This programme is crucial given that around 1 in 3 people have coronavirus without displaying any symptoms.

The single most important action we can all take to protect the NHS and save lives, is to stay at home.

So far, 131 local authorities have signed up to community testing, with 107 already having started testing in their communities. Many of these, including Essex and Milton Keynes, are focusing on the testing of critical workers and those who must leave home for essential reasons.

In addition to local authorities, NHS Test and Trace will also work closely with other government departments to scale up workforce testing. Many are already piloting regular workforce testing, with 15 large employers having taken up this offer already across 64 sites, including organisations operating in the food, manufacturing, energy and retail sectors, and within the public sector including job centres, transport networks, and the military. An estimated 27,000 tests have taken place across the public sector as part of pilots so far.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

With roughly a third of people who have coronavirus not showing symptoms, targeted asymptomatic testing and subsequent isolation is highly effective in breaking chains of transmission. Rapid, regular testing is led by local authorities who design programmes based on their in-depth knowledge of the local populations, so testing can have the greatest impact.

We are now expanding this offer to every local authority across the country, and asking testing to be targeted on workers who cannot work from home during this national lockdown, while asking employers to work with us to scale up workforce testing.

Lateral flow tests have already been hugely successful in finding positive cases quickly – and every positive case found is helping to stop the spread – so I encourage employers and workers to take this offer up. We must all do all we can to stop the spread of COVID, right now.

Targeted, regular community testing using lateral flow tests is highly effective and has already identified over 14,800 positive COVID-19 cases who would not have been identified without targeted asymptomatic testing, breaking chains of transmission in the community.

This latest expansion of the testing programme builds on the millions of asymptomatic critical workers being tested every week, such as NHS patient-facing staff and care home staff. Existing plans for the rapid testing of staff and students in secondary schools and colleges, and staff in primary schools, also remain in place. Secondary schools have set up testing sites and have started to test staff and pupils who remain in school, such as the children of critical workers, or vulnerable children. Primary schools will start to receive their test kits shortly for the weekly testing of their staff.

Lateral flow tests used by the UK government go through a rigorous evaluation by the country's leading scientists. This means they are accurate, reliable

and successfully identify those with COVID-19 who don't show symptoms and could pass on the virus without realising. Lateral flow tests can return results within 30 minutes, without needing to be sent to a lab.

NHS Test and Trace will now work with each local authority on an expanded community testing plan appropriate for them. This support will be rolled out during national lockdown restrictions, being kept closely under review.

We will continue to work with devolved administrations on their plans for community testing in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Milton Keynes Director of Public Health Vicky Head said:

In Milton Keynes our transmission rates are serious and there's no single hotspot or outbreak locally that's driving this – it's general person to person transmission that we can all help to control. One in 3 people with COVID-19 have no symptoms and could be spreading it without realising it.

Our pilot for frontline key workers is intended to help break transmission by identifying people who are positive for COVID-19 without displaying typical symptoms. By doing this we can help to reduce the number of COVID-19 cases, limit the number of people who might fall very ill, and protect the NHS.

Greg Jackson, CEO and founder of Octopus Energy, said:

Octopus Energy is delighted to be among the first companies to join the pilot to support the government in ramping up mass testing, helping to curb the spread of the virus and paving the way back to a life as normal as possible under the current conditions. We started testing in December and it was so well received by our staff that we're continuing it this year.

I'm very proud of the Octopus Energy team who have worked incredibly hard to look after our customers this year and also stringently followed all our COVID-19 guidelines whenever they needed to visit the office, with nearly everyone who had to come into the office taking a test.

Lee Sheppard, Director of Corporate Affairs and Policy at Appetito said:

Appetito and its sister company Wiltshire Farm Foods has a critical role in providing food during the COVID crisis. We serve some of the most vulnerable and at risk in hospitals, care homes, nurseries and schools and at home through Meals on Wheels and Wiltshire Farm Foods. During COVID, our services are more important than ever before, as many of our vulnerable customers may be solely reliant

upon us for their meal provision.

Ensuring our front-line services are able to continue to operate is therefore crucial. Working with the government to rapidly implement a mass testing programme across our manufacturing and distribution sites has built resilience into our business – as well as reassuring our staff and customers that we were doing everything possible to support their safety whilst at work.

Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said:

The safety of our workforce has been an absolute priority for this Government throughout the pandemic, and it has been incredible to see businesses go to extraordinary lengths to put the safety of their staff and customers first.

With the expansion of asymptomatic testing for those unable to work from home, added to our comprehensive COVID-Secure guidance, we can keep our economy on the move while giving individuals in key sectors complete confidence that their workplace is safe.

During this difficult period, it is fantastic to see so many major employers taking up the offer of rapid, regular workforce testing, and I'd encourage even more to do so as we pull together to protect our NHS and save lives.

Matthew Fell, CBI UK Chief Policy Director, said:

Rapid mass testing is a key piece of the puzzle when it comes to getting on top of the virus. The health and safety of staff is paramount for employers, which is why they will be right behind this initiative.

This expansion of testing will help more critical workers and those unable to work from home to operate safely, while also catching new cases more swiftly.

Ramping up asymptomatic testing to all workplaces will require hand-in-glove partnership between health services, local authorities and businesses in each and every community.

Cllr James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association, said:

Local knowledge and expertise has proved vital in combating COVID-19 and councils want to work with the government to develop testing strategies which contain and reduce the virus in every area of the country, and for every section of our diverse communities.

We are pleased that all councils will receive supplies of rapid coronavirus testing kits. It is essential that local deployment of these additional tests are co-ordinated through directors of public health, in order to make best possible use of the flexibility and freedom this will afford them, based on their local knowledge of level and location of infection in their areas.

The latest local authorities to join the community testing programme are:

- Doncaster
- Milton Keynes
- Slough

Essex, covering:

- Basildon
- Braintree
- Brentwood
- Castle Point
- Chelmsford
- Colchester
- Epping Forest
- Harlow
- Maldon
- Rochford
- Tendring
- Uttlesford