

Workplace testing programme expands to offer free rapid home testing

- Government makes rapid home testing available for all businesses with over 10 employees who cannot offer on-site testing
- Businesses must register interest by 12 April to access free tests
- Over 60,000 businesses already registered for regular and rapid tests for employees

Over 60,000 businesses across the country have already registered their interest to provide rapid tests to key workers. From 6 April, the workplace testing programme will supply home test kits to companies with over 10 workers where it is not possible to set up testing on-site, due to a lack of space or because companies operate across multiple sites.

Businesses across the country will be eligible to order the home test kits online to distribute to their employees. These self-test kits will be picked up by staff from their employer with clear instructions about how to take the test. Staff will then complete the home test in the normal way, before reporting their results to the NHS using the provided gov.uk address.

The workplace testing programme uses lateral flow tests (LFD) to rapidly detect the virus in 30 minutes. Swift detection of cases means those who test positive can isolate immediately and, in doing so, break chains of transmission and suppress the virus.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Rapid testing is a vital part of our roadmap, helping us to cautiously lift restrictions on our economy and society.

Around one in three people with coronavirus do not have any symptoms, so extending employee testing from the workplace to the home will help us identify more cases we otherwise wouldn't find, prevent further transmission and save lives.

60,000 businesses across the country have already registered for free, regular and rapid tests and I encourage many more to take up the offer, helping to keep their employees and their families safe.

Businesses are encouraged to register before 12 April in order to access free tests until the end of June, even if they're not yet open or are not able to start using the tests straight away.

As well as reporting their result directly to the NHS, employees should advise their employer of a positive result and take a confirmatory PCR test. Employers will retain an important role in encouraging their employees to take and report the results of their test.

Matthew Fell, CBI Chief UK Policy Director, said:

Mass, rapid workplace testing is an essential pillar of the roadmap for reopening, alongside the vaccine rollout. Having the option for staff to test at home will enable more firms to embrace workplace testing, as not all employers will have the space or facilities to run testing programmes on their premises. The move to home testing reflects ongoing, high quality dialogue between business and government. We'd encourage as many firms as possible to register before the 12 April deadline, as part of their broader efforts to keep staff and customers safe.

Employers with fewer than 10 people can alternatively access regular testing through the community testing programme, which is now offered by all local authorities in England. Work is also underway to allow staff of small businesses to order tests online to be sent to their home.

Helen Dickinson, Chief Executive of the British Retail Consortium said:

The BRC welcomes the proposal to extend the workplace testing programme to include home testing. This is something we have called for as the next step for smaller businesses and stores where the space for testing at work is limited. It is also supported by employees as a practical approach.

Testing will form a crucial part of everyday life as parts of society reopen. Regular testing could be the difference between a workplace being able to stay open and operational, or needing to close due to a Covid-19 outbreak. For many employers on-site testing has already become an essential part of its employee offer and a routine part of working life.

Around 1 in 3 people with coronavirus don't have symptoms, which means they could be spreading the virus in workplaces without knowing.

Regular, rapid testing is already in place for millions of people across the NHS, care homes and schools. The government has also confirmed twice-weekly home testing using lateral flow tests for free to all adults in households with primary, secondary school and college aged children and young people, including childcare and support bubbles.

This is in addition to the two home tests for all secondary and college students and staff per week. Staff in primary schools, and in private, voluntary and independent nurseries also have access to rapid testing through their workplace.

The announcement comes as a new set of statistics published on Friday, by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), revealed 86% of people testing positive for coronavirus are fully complying with self-isolation guidance for their full isolation period.

Data also showed 90% of the contacts reached by NHS Test and Trace are fully adhering with the rules and that 97% of NHS COVID-19 app users started to self-isolate within 24 hours of receiving a notification. The majority of respondents (68%) also fully understood the self-isolation guidance. Of people who did not fully comply, the most common breaches were to buy food, get medicines or medical appointments.

BT Chief Medical Officer, Dr Richard Caddis said:

BT is pleased to have been supporting this important government trial in England, offering rapid home testing to our field engineers who have done such an incredible job of keeping the country connected.

Eastwood Park CEO John Thatcher said:

We originally invested in testing kits for all staff and the hundreds of learners returning to our classroom and laboratory-based training. Now to benefit from support from the government providing kits for staff, which on average could mean 120 tests per week, is allowing us to focus on our learners. The additional security and ease presented by the new self-testing operation, sitting alongside all the other day to day measures, has been a big confidence boost for everyone.