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Guidance

# Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested

Guidance on coronavirus testing, including who is eligible for a test and how to get tested.

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From:

Department of Health and Social Care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care>)

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You can get a throat and nose swab test for whether you currently have coronavirus. This is part of the 5-pillar strategy for coronavirus testing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-scaling-up-testing-programmes>). Testing is most effective within 3 days of symptoms developing.

## Who can be tested

The following groups of people can ask for a test through the NHS website

(<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-for-coronavirus/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>):

- anyone in England and Wales who has symptoms of coronavirus, whatever their age
- anyone in Scotland and Northern Ireland aged 5 and over who has symptoms of coronavirus

The following groups of people can access priority testing through GOV.UK:

- essential workers in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- anyone in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland over 5 years old who has symptoms of coronavirus and lives with an essential worker
- children under 5 years old in England and Wales who have symptoms of coronavirus and live with an essential worker (this test must be performed by a parent or guardian)

See the guidance on testing for essential workers and the list of essential workers below.

Tests for essential workers are prioritised over the tests available for the wider public through the NHS.

See the guidance below on testing for care home residents and workers.

## Arrange a test if you're an essential worker

The self-referral test booking route is available for essential workers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The employer-referral test booking route is available for essential workers in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### Self-referral

Apply for a coronavirus test if you're an essential worker (<https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test>)

You should be able to choose between a test site appointment and a home test kit.

Book a test site appointment if you have a verification code (<https://test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/register/start>)

### Employer referral

The employer referral portal allows employers to refer essential workers who are self-isolating either because they or member(s) of their household have coronavirus symptoms, for testing.

The employer referral portal is a secure portal for employers to use to upload the full list of names and contact details of self-isolating essential workers.

If referred through this portal, essential workers will receive a text message with a unique invitation code to book a test for themselves (<https://test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/register/start>) (if symptomatic) or their symptomatic household member(s) at a regional testing site.

In order to obtain a login, employers of essential workers should email [portalservicedesk@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:portalservicedesk@dhsc.gov.uk) with:

- organisation name
- nature of the organisation's business
- region
- names (where possible) and email addresses of the 2 users who will load essential worker contact details

Once employer details have been verified, 2 login credentials will be issued for the employer referral portal.

## **The testing process**

The test involves taking a swab of the nose and the back of the throat, which can be done by the person themselves (self-administered) or by someone else (assisted).

The different ways you can get tested are covered below.

### **Test sites**

We're establishing a network of drive-through and walk-through test sites.

Watch a video explaining the process for drive-through testing:

Coronavirus tests for essential workers (<https://youtu.be/JVB6TC49ss0>)

### **Home testing**

Home test kits can be delivered to someone's door so they can test themselves and their family without leaving the house. Home test kit availability will be initially limited, but more will become available.

If you have been delivered a home testing kit or have been given a self-test kit at a regional test site, here is a tutorial video that supports the written instructions in your pack, from Dr Amir Khan:

How to take a coronavirus self-test swab (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lo6g-TYZ-c&>)

### **Mobile testing units**

Mobile testing units travel around the UK to increase access to coronavirus testing. They respond to need, travelling to test essential workers at sites including care homes, police stations and prisons.

New units are being brought into operation each day.

### **Satellite centres**

NHS capability is being increased by providing test kits directly to 'satellite' centres at places like hospitals that have a particularly urgent or significant need.

### **NHS facilities**

Testing within an NHS facility such as a hospital is available for patients and some NHS workers.

Across all these testing methods, there is a network of couriers who collect the completed samples and deliver them safely to one of our laboratories. The swab samples are analysed at our labs and the result is communicated back to the individual.

We aim to return test results within 48 hours of a swab being taken, or within 72 hours for a home test.

### **Care homes**

## England

In England, all registered adult care homes can apply for coronavirus tests.

You should contact your local Health Protection Team (HPT) (<https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>) if:

- you suspect your care home has a new coronavirus outbreak
- it has been 28 days or longer since your last case and you have new cases

Your HPT will provide advice and arrange the first tests.

For testing in other situations, you should apply for testing kits following the instructions below.

## Scotland

In a care home where there is one or more confirmed case of coronavirus, the local health board must offer testing to all staff and residents regardless of symptoms as part of enhanced outbreak investigations. Testing will be organised by local health board testing teams, using local and NHS Scotland laboratory capacity.

In a care home with no positive cases for 2 weeks or more, the local health board must offer testing to all staff on a weekly basis. Please follow the instructions below to access this routine testing of staff in your care home.

## Wales

Existing arrangements include testing:

- all residents and staff of care homes with ongoing cases of COVID-19 and any home reporting a new outbreak
- larger care homes registered for 50 or more beds
- all people being discharged from hospital to live in care homes regardless of whether or not they were admitted to hospital with COVID-19
- all people who are being transferred between care homes and for new admissions from the community

This policy has been supplemented by a large-scale testing programme covering all residents and staff across care homes in Wales that have not reported an outbreak or any cases of coronavirus in the last 28 days. It's being followed up through a weekly rolling programme to test care home staff.

Wales' policy for testing in care homes will continue to be reviewed and adapted as the scientific evidence changes

## How to test care home residents and workers

You can apply for coronavirus testing kits to test the residents and/or staff of your care home. You can apply whether or not any of your residents or staff have coronavirus symptoms.

Apply for coronavirus tests for a care home (<https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-care-home>)

## Regular testing in care homes (England)

Regular testing (retesting) for care homes in England will begin from 6 July. This involves care homes testing staff weekly and residents every 28 days.

Retesting will begin with care homes for the over-65s and those with dementia. This is because these homes were the first to receive testing in the initial round of whole care home testing, and following SAGE and Public Health England (PHE) advice.

It will take 4 weeks to provide retesting to all care homes for the over-65s. These care homes will be divided into 4 groups, with a new group starting its cycle each week.

Retesting will be offered to other adult care homes from early August.

Any specialist care homes that have not yet registered for their initial whole care home tests should still apply on the care home portal (<https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-care-home>) to receive their initial whole care home tests.

Care homes will need to re-register on the care home portal (<https://www.gov.uk/apply-coronavirus-test-care-home>) to apply for retesting. Applications for retesting are now open for care homes caring for the over-65s and those with dementia.

## Workers with symptoms

Care home workers with symptoms should be self-isolating and can access testing through the self-referral or employer referral portals, above.

See a visual guide to adult social care testing

([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/885172/Care\\_Homes\\_Testing\\_Matrix\\_v2.1.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/885172/Care_Homes_Testing_Matrix_v2.1.pdf)) (PDF, 68.4KB, 1 page).

## Information about testing kits

There are 2 types of test kits delivered to care homes:

- Randox test kits
- all other types, known as Kingfisher test kits

The test kits look similar and test for whether someone currently has coronavirus in the same way. You will be told which test kits you will be using when you receive confirmation of your delivery. All of these kits are throat and nose swab tests and will tell a person whether they had coronavirus at the time the test took place. They cannot tell a person if they have had coronavirus in the past.

Watch a video on how to administer nasal and throat swabs for residents:

Coronavirus test tutorial for care homes with Dr Sarah Jarvis (<https://youtu.be/110jcv37WzI>)

Carers and nurses who will be swabbing residents in care homes should complete the online care home swabbing competency assessment before carrying out swabbing.

Individuals can register at [www.genqa.org/carehomes](https://www.genqa.org/carehomes) (<https://www.genqa.org/carehomes>) or care home managers can create an organisational account by contacting [info@genqa.org](mailto:info@genqa.org).

## **Book your courier collection**

A courier will collect your used testing kits. These will be taken to a lab for processing.

Book your courier collection (<https://carehomecollect.co.uk>) by 7pm at least a day before carrying out testing.

Carry out testing on the day of collection.

## **Documents for care homes using the online application portal**

- guidance on Randox testing  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/897877/retesting\\_randox\\_guidance\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/897877/retesting_randox_guidance_.pdf)) (PDF, 3.1MB, 19 pages)
- guidance on non-Randox testing  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/897875/retesting\\_non\\_randox\\_guidance\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/897875/retesting_non_randox_guidance_.pdf)) (PDF, 4.46MB, 32 pages)
- guidance on non-Randox testing (Scotland)  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/897756/Care\\_Home\\_Testing\\_Guidance\\_v02-07\\_Scotland\\_v3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/897756/Care_Home_Testing_Guidance_v02-07_Scotland_v3.pdf)) (PDF, 2.1MB, 17 pages)
- guidance on non-Randox testing (Wales)  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/895751/guidance\\_on\\_non-randox\\_testing\\_\\_Wales\\_\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895751/guidance_on_non-randox_testing__Wales__.pdf)) (PDF, 2.28MB, 20 pages)
- how to use Randox test kits  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/896852/Care\\_Home\\_Testing\\_Instructions\\_Randox\\_v23-06\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896852/Care_Home_Testing_Instructions_Randox_v23-06_.pdf)) (PDF, 1.34MB, 2 pages)
- how to use non-Randox test kits  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/895753/how\\_to\\_use\\_non-randox\\_kits.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895753/how_to_use_non-randox_kits.pdf)) (PDF, 564KB, 2 pages)
- suggested template for recording resident tests  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/884299/Template\\_for\\_logging\\_care\\_home\\_testing\\_for\\_residents.odt](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884299/Template_for_logging_care_home_testing_for_residents.odt)) (ODT, 11.3KB)
- suggested template for recording staff tests  
([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/884302/Template\\_for\\_logging\\_care\\_home\\_testing\\_for\\_staff.odt](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884302/Template_for_logging_care_home_testing_for_staff.odt)) (ODT, 10.3KB)

## **List of essential workers and those prioritised for testing (England only)**

- all NHS and social care staff, including:
  - doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff, including volunteers and unpaid carers
  - the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector
  - those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines, and medical and personal protective equipment

- NHS Blood and Transplant frontline staff (blood donation staff, specialist nurses for organ donation, staff running therapeutic apheresis services in NHS hospitals)
- those providing ancillary support to NHS workers (such as hotel accommodation for NHS staff)
- personal care assistants
- essential public services staff, including:
  - prisons, probation, courts and tribunals staff, judiciary
  - religious staff
  - charities and workers delivering critical frontline services
  - those responsible for the management of the deceased
  - journalists and broadcasters covering coronavirus or providing public service broadcasting
  - public health and environmental staff, such as specialist community public health nursing
- public safety and national security staff, including:
  - police and support staff
  - Ministry of Defence civilians, contractors and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of critical defence and national security outputs and critical to the response to the coronavirus pandemic), including defence medical staff
  - fire and rescue service employees (including support staff),
  - National Crime Agency staff, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas
  - British Transport Police and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency
- transport workers, including:
  - those who keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the coronavirus response
  - those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass
- education and childcare workers, including:
  - support and teaching staff
  - social workers
  - specialist education professionals
- critical personnel in the production and distribution of food, drink and essential goods, including:
  - those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery
  - those critical to the provision of other essential goods, such as medical supply chain and distribution workers, including community pharmacy and testing (such as PHE labs), and veterinary medicine
  - workers critical to the continuity of essential movement of goods
- local and national government staff critical to the effective delivery of the coronavirus response, or delivering essential public services, such as the payment of benefits
- public and environmental health staff, including in government agencies and arm's length bodies
- funeral industry workers
- frontline local authority staff and volunteers, including
  - those working with vulnerable children and adults, victims of domestic abuse, and the homeless and rough sleepers (and hotel staff supporting these groups)
  - voluntary sector organisations providing substance misuse treatment
- utilities, communication and financial services staff, including:

- staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure)
- the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage)
- information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the coronavirus response
- essential staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 essential services), postal services and delivery, payments providers and waste disposal sectors

Read the privacy notice on coronavirus testing for essential workers

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-privacy-information>).

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1. 6 July 2020

Replaced 2 attachments: 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'guidance on non-Randox testing'. The changes reflect the new retesting programme for care homes, including how often staff and residents should retest. The sections in the guidance that talk about next steps for positive testing patients have been removed. Instead, people are directed to Public Health England guidance in the 'Future advice' section.

2. 3 July 2020

Added information on regular care home testing (retesting) in England.

3. 1 July 2020

Updated 2 attachments to reflect changes to the registration system for these testing kits: 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'how to use Randox test kits'.

4. 26 June 2020

Replaced all non-Randox guidance documents in 'Documents for care homes using the online application' section to include the updated prelabelled instructions for England, Scotland and Wales.

5. 25 June 2020

Replaced the following attachments with updated registration link: 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'how to use Randox test kits'.

6. 18 June 2020

'Drive-through appointment' has been changed to 'test site appointment' in the 'Arrange a test if you're an essential worker' section. 'Drive-through regional testing sites' has been changed to 'drive-through and walk-through test sites' in the 'Test sites' section.

7. 17 June 2020

Added guidance on care homes testing in Wales and a new attachment: 'guidance on non-Randox testing (Wales)'. Replaced 'guidance on Randox testing', 'guidance on non-Randox testing' and 'how to use Randox test kits'.

8. 11 June 2020

Added attachment: 'guidance on non-Randox testing (Scotland)'.

9. 8 June 2020

Added guidance about testing care home staff and residents in Scotland.

10. 5 June 2020

Added information and link to book a courier collection for used testing kits in care homes. Replaced 'guidance on Randox testing' and 'guidance on non-Randox testing'. Removed: 'This testing is currently only available in England. At the moment, you can only get tests if your care home looks after older people or people with dementia.'

11. 2 June 2020

Added documents for care homes: 'How to use Randox test kits' and 'How to use non-Randox test kits'.

12. 1 June 2020

Two documents have been replaced with updated versions to reflect the new courier collection process for care homes: 'guidance pack for care home managers on non-Randox test kits (e.g. Kingfisher)' and 'guidance pack for care home managers on Randox kits'.

13. 29 May 2020

Added that NHS testing for children under 5 years old is only available in England and Scotland.

14. 29 May 2020

Added that children under 5 years old in Wales who have symptoms of coronavirus and live with an essential worker can now be tested.

15. 28 May 2020

Updated to reflect that essential worker testing is available in Wales, and that testing for 5-year-olds with symptoms of coronavirus and living with an essential worker is available in England only.

16. 28 May 2020

Added that children under 5 years old in England and Wales who have symptoms of coronavirus and live with an essential worker can now be tested.

17. 19 May 2020

Added a link to book a drive-through test appointment if you have a verification code.

18. 18 May 2020

Added information on the NHS testing service for people with coronavirus symptoms.

19. 14 May 2020

Amended wording on what to do if a care home suspects a resident has coronavirus symptoms and how to test care home residents and workers. Added updated version of the visual guide to adult social care testing.

20. 11 May 2020

Added information on testing for care home residents and workers (England only).

21. 4 May 2020

Added unpaid carers to list of essential workers and those prioritised for testing (England only).

22. 3 May 2020

Added personal care assistants to list of essential workers

23. 29 April 2020

Updates have been made to the 'Who can be tested' section for clarity. We're also now testing: social care workers and residents in care homes (with or without symptoms) both to investigate outbreaks and, following successful pilots, as part of a rolling programme to test all care homes, and NHS workers and patients without symptoms where there is a clinical need, in line with NHS England guidance.

24. 28 April 2020

Clarified that the new testing criteria apply to England only. Added that anyone with symptoms living with someone who is eligible is themselves also eligible for a test.

25. 28 April 2020  
Added categories to list of people who can be tested.
26. 27 April 2020  
Updated to reflect that test booking routes are now available for essential workers in Northern Ireland, and updated employer referral requirements.
27. 24 April 2020  
Updated to reflect that test booking routes are now available for essential workers in Scotland.
28. 24 April 2020  
Updated the list of essential workers and added information on when more testing kits and appointment slots will become available.
29. 24 April 2020  
Added guidance for essential workers and employers about arranging a test, including a link to the self-referral service.
30. 23 April 2020  
Added updated list of essential workers.
31. 17 April 2020  
Updated with expanded list of frontline workers eligible for coronavirus (COVID-19) testing in England and information on the different test options that are being developed.
32. 15 April 2020  
First published.

## Related content

- NHS test and trace: how it works (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): antibody tests (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-antibody-tests>)
- COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>)
- Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>)
- COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>)

## Collection

- Coronavirus (COVID-19): adult social care guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-social-care-guidance>)

## Explore the topic

- Infectious diseases (<https://www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-protection-infectious-diseases>)
- Health and wellbeing during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/health-and-wellbeing>)
- Healthcare workers, carers and care settings during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/healthcare-workers-carers-and-care-settings>)

- Testing for coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/testing>)