

Government boost to rapid workplace testing

New government drive to increase workplace testing in sectors open during lockdown, to detect coronavirus (COVID-19) in people who are not showing symptoms.

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- New government drive to increase workplace testing in sectors open during lockdown, to detect coronavirus (COVID-19) in people who are not showing symptoms
- Government departments tasked with ensuring targeted, rapid testing is set up in all key workplaces to ensure vital public and economic services can continue
- Criteria for joining the workplace testing programme is reduced to businesses with more than 50 employees, boosting the availability of rapid testing further

Cabinet ministers have been tasked to encourage their sectors to take up the offer of rapid workplace testing, marking efforts to normalise testing in the workplace across both public and private sectors.

The government is working closely with organisations across different sectors that are vital to the running of our country and where employees cannot work from home during lockdown, from transport networks to food manufacturers, to sign up to rapid testing programmes that identify cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) in employees who are not showing symptoms. This will help stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and ensure vital public and economic services can continue.

Many employers have already taken up the offer of rapid, regular workforce testing, with 112 UK organisations across almost 500 sites joining government backed rapid testing. Today, the government can confirm that it has widened the criteria for joining the workplace rapid testing programme from businesses with more than 250 employees, to businesses with more than 50 employees.

This hugely increases the number of different businesses that are able to sign up, so that small and medium size companies can benefit from rapid testing as we work to Build Back Better.

Testing is key to breaking the chains of transmission. More than 2.5 million tests have been distributed across the public and private sectors so far, and an online portal has been launched to make it even easier for business in the private sector to get involved and find out

more about offering rapid testing in the workplace. All those who can work from home should continue to do so.

Around one in three people who have coronavirus (COVID-19) have no symptoms and may be unknowingly spreading the virus. This expansion of testing will find more positive cases, keeping workers who cannot work from home unknowingly passing on the virus and protecting vital public services. It's essential we still continue to use tests to safeguard the population and prevent the spread of the virus.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

“To save lives and protect the NHS, we have again asked for everyone to work from home. But we know that for some this is not possible, which is why the workplace rapid testing programme is so important.

“Employers should regularly test their staff, and this drive across government to raise awareness and encourage more businesses to introduce rapid testing for employees is incredibly important. When you consider that around one in three people have the virus without symptoms and could potentially infect people without even knowing it, it becomes clear why focusing testing on those without symptoms is so essential.

“We are already working with many employers to scale up workforce testing, spanning the food industry, retail sector, transport network, and across the public sector too. I strongly urge businesses and employees across the country to take up this offer of rapid testing to help stop this virus spreading further.”

Notes to editors

Lateral flow tests used by the UK government go through a rigorous evaluation by the country's leading scientists. Tests detect cases with high levels of virus, making them effective in finding infectious individuals who are not showing any symptoms and are the most likely to transmit the disease.

[See further information on rapid workplace testing](#)

[See latest testing statistics](#)

NHS Test & Trace will support organisations to deliver scalable asymptomatic testing through provision of a digital solution, clinical protocol, supply of tests kits, guidance, training and framework for delivery.

Tests are currently being provided free to both public and private sector employers until at least 31 March. The government's support will be kept under review and we will engage with employers before any changes to the support offer are made.

Extensive clinical evaluation from Public Health England and the University of Oxford research shows lateral flow tests are specific and sensitive enough to be deployed for mass testing, including for asymptomatic people. The [Oxford University and Public Health evaluation is available](#).