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COVID-19: who can get tested for coronavirus under the new UK guidance?

The UK government pledged to test 100,000 people per day for coronavirus by the end of April. They managed to squeeze past the finishing line on 30th April and more of us are now eligible for testing than had been previously – so who can get tested?

This article has not been updated since it was written and the advice in it may not be up to date. You can find our latest features and advice on coronavirus and COVID-19 in our coronavirus hub.

Use Patient's **coronavirus checker tool** if you have any symptoms of fever or a new cough. Until you have used the tool and been advised what action to take, please stay at home and avoid contact with other people.

Widespread testing is key to understanding and controlling the coronavirus pandemic. Across the world, governments are making it their mission to organise mass [testing](#) so that people with COVID-19 can [self-isolate](#) and avoid passing it on to others.

The five pillars of testing

The UK government has a [5-pillar strategy](#) for testing. According to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), these pillars are:

- Scaling up NHS swab testing for those with a medical need and, where possible, the most critical key workers.
- Mass swab testing for critical key workers in the NHS, social care and other sectors.
- Mass antibody testing to help determine if people have immunity to coronavirus.
- Surveillance testing to learn more about the disease and help develop new tests and treatments.
- Spearheading a Diagnostics National Effort to build a mass-testing capacity on a completely new scale.

The government also announced a set of five tests which the UK must pass in order for lockdown measures to be relaxed. This includes ensuring that there is a sufficient supply of testing to meet future demand. Tests will be key to any easing of restrictions, to ensure that the number of cases of coronavirus doesn't shoot up as soon as we're allowed to return to business as usual.

Who can get tested?

The test currently available is a 'PCR' (polymerase chain reaction) test to determine whether you currently have COVID-19. [Antibody tests](#) to determine whether you have previously had it and have immunity are not yet available, as the ones which have been tested aren't accurate enough to use.

Patients who end up in hospital with coronavirus symptoms have been tested to find out if they have COVID-19 for some time in order to inform their treatment. Going forward, everyone admitted to hospital will be tested, regardless of the reason for their admission.

Those who aren't in hospital who would like to be tested must be in certain categories. The criteria for testing are different in [England](#), Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In England, those who can get tested currently include:

- All essential workers (as listed by **DHSC**) including NHS and social care workers with symptoms.
- Anyone over 65 with symptoms.
- Anyone with symptoms whose work cannot be done from home (such as construction workers, plumbers, shop workers, delivery drivers etc).
- Anyone who has coronavirus symptoms and lives with anyone from the above categories.
- Social care workers and residents in care homes, regardless of whether they have symptoms, both to investigate potential outbreaks and later as part of a programme to test all care homes.
- Household members of NHS workers, within three days of developing symptoms (in line with **NHS England guidance**).

You can apply for a test online at **GOV.UK**.

I'm in one of these groups. How do I get tested?

You can apply for a coronavirus test online if you fall into one of the above categories. Testing is most effective within three days of getting symptoms.

Tests are being offered as drive-through appointments and as home test kits (although these are currently limited). Mobile testing units which can travel to offer tests are being developed. Capacity for testing is also being increased at NHS facilities and satellite centres.

In addition, in the coming weeks, **100,000 people** from across England will be randomly selected and sent self-testing kits to determine whether they are currently infected. This is to improve our understanding of how many people are currently infected.

Coronavirus PCR testing involves either the person themselves or someone else swabbing the nose and back of the throat. These swabs are then sent to laboratories. You should know whether you have coronavirus within 48 hours of a swab or 72 hours of a home test.

I can't get tested but I think I have coronavirus. What should I do?

Anyone who experiences symptoms of coronavirus – namely a fever or a new, continuous cough – should [self-isolate](#) and not leave their house for at least seven days, unless they have been tested and found to be negative for coronavirus. Anyone they live with should self-isolate for fourteen days or for at least seven days from the onset of their own symptoms. Depending on your symptoms, you may need to seek medical help – use the Patient coronavirus [symptom checker](#) to find out whether you should do this.

If your fever is persisting after seven days, you need to continue to self-isolate. You can stop self-isolating if you are still coughing after seven days as long as your fever has settled and you are feeling generally better.

[Mild coronavirus](#) can be [treated at home](#) with rest, plenty of fluids and over-the-counter medicines. If you have to go to hospital as a result of coronavirus symptoms, you will be tested.

If your symptoms are [getting worse](#), you should seek medical advice. You can use the Patient coronavirus [symptom checker](#) to find out what you should do next. If you have or have had coronavirus you can also fill in the COVID-19 [symptom surveillance survey](#) to contribute to research informing the NHS response to the coronavirus pandemic.

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