

INFORMATION ON HOW AND WHEN TO GET TESTED FOR COVID 19

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There are different tests you can get to check if you have coronavirus (COVID-19). The test you need depends on why you're getting tested.

The 2 main tests are:

- PCR tests – mainly for people with symptoms, they're sent to a lab to be checked
- rapid lateral flow tests – only for people who do not have symptoms, they give a quick result using a device similar to a pregnancy test

Both tests are free.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19

Get a PCR test as soon as possible if you have any of these symptoms, even if mild:

- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

Stay at home until you get your test result – only leave your home to have a test. [Check if people you live with need to self-isolate](#)

[Get a PCR test if you have symptoms of COVID-19 on GOV.UK](#)

Rapid tests if you do not have symptoms

About 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 do not have symptoms but can still infect others.

Rapid tests help to check if someone has COVID-19. If people test positive and self-isolate, it helps stop the virus spreading.

Research shows rapid tests are a reliable test for COVID-19. They give a quick result and do not need to be sent to a lab.

Even if you're vaccinated, you could still catch the virus or pass it on. Doing rapid tests helps to protect yourself and others.

[Get rapid COVID-19 tests if you do not have symptoms](#)

Important

If you get a positive lateral flow test result, you do not need to confirm the result with a PCR test. You only need to confirm a positive lateral flow test if:

- you're applying for a [Test and Trace Support Payment](#)
- you're eligible for new COVID-19 treatments
- you're asked to do so as part of research
- you have a positive lateral flow test on or before day 2 of arriving in England from outside the UK

Other reasons to get tested

If you've been in close contact with someone who's tested positive

If you've been in close contact with someone who's tested positive for COVID-19 and you're:

- fully vaccinated or under 18 years old you should do daily rapid tests (1 a day for 7 days). [Find out more about daily testing on GOV.UK](#)
- not fully vaccinated, [get a PCR test to check if you have COVID-19 on GOV.UK](#)

What does close contact mean?

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Getting tested can tell you if you had COVID-19 at the time you did the test.

If you test positive, you can help the NHS contact people who may have caught the virus from you. They can then self-isolate and avoid passing it on to others.

Going into hospital

You may need to get tested if you're due to have surgery or a procedure.

The hospital will arrange this for you. Contact your hospital department if you have any questions.

Travelling abroad from England or returning

You may need to take a test before, during and after your trip.

Check the guidance on:

- [travel abroad from England during COVID-19 on GOV.UK](#)

- [what you need to do when you return to England on GOV.UK](#)

You'll need to pay for a test yourself. You cannot use a free test from the NHS.

[Find out about private providers of COVID-19 testing on GOV.UK](#)

If you're taking part in surge testing

Surge testing is taking place in some areas of England to help prevent new outbreaks of COVID-19 from spreading.

Your local council will tell you if you need to take part and how to get tested.

If you're taking part in surge testing, you'll be asked to do a PCR test at a test site, or to use a PCR test kit at home.

[Find out if there is surge testing in your area on GOV.UK](#)

Care home residents and staff

Care home managers can get PCR tests for staff and residents even if they do not have symptoms.

[Get PCR tests for a care home on GOV.UK](#)

Information:

Advice in other parts of the UK

- [Scotland – NHS Inform: COVID-19 testing](#)
- [Wales – Welsh Government: get tested for COVID-19](#)
- [Northern Ireland – nidirect: COVID-19](#)