



→ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) | National lockdown: stay at home

→ [Brexit](#) | Check how the new rules affect you

[Home](#) > [Education, training and skills](#) > [Pupil wellbeing, behaviour and attendance](#) > [Safeguarding pupils](#)
> [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges](#)



Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19) asymptomatic testing in schools and colleges

Updated 21 January 2021

Contents

[Approach](#)

[Conducting testing in schools and colleges](#)

[Print this page](#)

To safeguard the health of the teaching workforce and keep as many staff, pupils and students in school and college as possible, we have made rapid lateral flow coronavirus (COVID-19) tests available to schools and colleges. The use of rapid lateral flow tests allows us to identify individuals with coronavirus (COVID-19) who do not have symptoms, which make up around a third of all cases.

Finding asymptomatic cases, along with other infection prevention and control measures such as social distancing, can help us manage the transmission of the virus.

With a phased approach beginning in January, testing has been made available to all schools and colleges.

Approach

Lateral flow devices have been provided to all schools, including primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, alternative provision, and colleges. Schools and colleges are able to offer their workforce (who are on-site) access to 2 rapid results tests every week. This will help identify staff who are carrying the virus without displaying symptoms, reducing the risk of transmission.

All schools and colleges should offer regular twice weekly testing to their staff. Testing is not mandatory for staff and they do not need to provide proof of a negative test result to attend school or college in person, although participation in testing is strongly encouraged.

Based on advice from Public Health England (PHE) and NHS Test and Trace, the testing programme initially included offering those who came into close contact with a positive case in colleges the option of 7 days of daily contact testing as an alternative to self-isolation.

PHE and NHS Test and Trace have now reviewed their initial advice in light of the higher prevalence and rates of transmission of the new variant. They have concluded that these changes in the virus warrant further evaluation work and that daily contact testing in place of self-isolation should be paused until this evaluation has taken place. We will update this guidance once this evaluation is complete.

Further information can be found in the [PHE position statement](#).

Conducting testing in schools and colleges

Recent pilots have shown how rapid testing can be used effectively and have positive impacts in schools and colleges. The lateral flow tests that will be provided to schools and colleges produce a result in 30 minutes and do not require a laboratory to process. Schools and colleges have been provided with testing kits including personal protective equipment (PPE) where appropriate. There is also comprehensive guidance and training materials and support to introduce a testing programme that works for staff.

Schools and colleges should make it clear that a negative test result does not remove the risk of transmission. In some cases, someone who has tested negative may still have the undetected disease and be infectious. It is therefore essential that everyone continues to follow good hygiene and observe social distancing measures regardless of whether they have been tested.

This testing programme does not replace the current testing programme for those with symptoms. Anyone who is showing symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) will be required to self-isolate until the result from a lab-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is known.

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Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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[Check how the new Brexit rules affect you](#)

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[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

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[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

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[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

Departments and policy

[How government works](#)

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