



Department  
for Education

# **Higher Education coronavirus (COVID- 19) NHS Test and Trace handbook**

**September 2020**

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## Overview

This guidance applies nationally but you should follow local public health guidance if restrictions are in place in your area.

The following advice is to ensure Higher Education (HE) providers feel supported and aware of the coronavirus (COVID-19) testing channels available to students and staff before the start of the 2020/21 academic year.

Testing and contact tracing are only one part of the series of interventions including social distancing and other measures that help prevent spread and should not be the only pillar of a prevention strategy.

This document is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive but pulls together available options and provides reassurance to develop your own testing policies.

HE providers are autonomous institutions and are best placed to work with local authorities to put in place bespoke measures to manage risk and ensure accessible testing for those who need it.

## Key points

- Anyone with symptoms is eligible for a coronavirus (COVID-19) test. If students or staff experience coronavirus symptoms, they should self-isolate immediately and get tested as soon as possible.
- We expect HE providers to work with local authorities to utilise the high level of testing infrastructure already in place for symptomatic testing and coordinate the development and implementation of clear plans for responding to local outbreak and associated guidance.
- Testing is available on a **symptomatic** basis only through the National Testing Programme.
- Local testing sites will be expanded and be the most efficient and accessible testing option for students.
- HE providers should ensure that students and staff are aware of national guidance on testing, contact tracing and self-isolation – and promote the importance of following that guidance to help stop the spread of the virus.

## NHS Test and Trace: overview

NHS Test and Trace:

- provides testing for anyone who has [symptoms of coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) to find out if they have the virus
- gets in touch with anyone who has had a positive test result to help them share information about any close recent contacts they have had
- alerts those contacts, where necessary, and notifies them that they need to self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus
- works with local government to help prevent and respond to local outbreaks

## Eligibility for testing

Anyone with symptoms is eligible for a coronavirus test.

If anyone develops one of the three main coronavirus symptoms, they should seek a COVID-19 test **as soon as possible**, and must [self-isolate](#) until they get a result. This means not leaving their accommodation for any reason other than getting a test. People living in the same household must also self-isolate.

The three main coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms are:

- **a high temperature** – this means feeling hot to touch on the chest or back (temperature does not need to be measured)
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing frequently for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if someone usually has a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- **a loss or change to sense of smell or taste** – this means not being able to smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

It is important to only get a test if you have coronavirus symptoms or have been asked to get tested. This will help make sure people who need a test can get one.

Asymptomatic testing is provided only in specific circumstances and on the recommendation of public health experts, for instance in areas of high prevalence or high risk or where there is a local outbreak. People without symptoms should not order tests except where instructed to do so through being enrolled in a pilot scheme or at the direct request of their local public health team or director of public health.

## Testing channels

There are different ways in which someone with symptoms can get tested. These are:

## Local testing sites

Local testing sites are walk-through and are the most accessible testing channel for students. The number of walk-through sites is growing rapidly with around 200 LTS set to be running by the end of October. Site locations are identified by local authorities on the basis of locally identified need. Walk-through test sites are the preferred testing channel option for students due to their improved accessibility and fast turnaround of test results.

## Home testing

Home test kits can be delivered to someone's door so they can test themselves without leaving their accommodation. This is a swab test which needs to be taken within the first five days of developing any of the three main coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms (see above). The turnaround times for home testing are not as fast as for local, regional or mobile testing sites, so we recommend using these other channels wherever possible.

[Home test kits can be ordered online](#). Students who are without a credit footprint and are therefore unable to order a home test online can instead call **119** to order over the phone.

The following resources may be useful for students and we encourage HE providers to share these guides as part of your coronavirus (COVID-19) communications strategy:

- [written instructions for the home test kit](#)
- [a video tutorial that supports the above instructions](#)

## Regional testing sites

A network of drive-through regional test sites have been established nationally. We recognise that many students do not have their own transport at university or college and may be new to their area's public transport network. However, drive-through sites are a suitable option for those who live locally or work at the university or college with access to a car. There are 75 RTS with capacity for c.100,000 tests per day.

This is a swab test which needs to be taken within the first five days of developing any of the three main coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms (see above).

Please note the following resources:

- [a video explaining the process of a regional testing site](#)
- [a video explaining how to self-swab at a regional testing site](#)

## Mobile testing units

A mobile testing unit is a self-contained testing unit that can park at a suitable identified site and is operated under the control of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in partnership with specified service providers. Where these are in the vicinity of

a university campus, students and staff can book a test via the online portal as they would other symptomatic testing routes.

There are currently 236 mobile testing units positioned throughout the country. NHS Test and Trace deploys mobile testing units to respond to local outbreaks, acting on requests by Regional Coordination Groups.

If there is a local outbreak, the local Director of Public Health may request a mobile testing unit via the Regional Coordination Group. Depending on availability, NHS Test and Trace will dispatch a mobile testing unit to a suitable identified site as soon as possible to test symptomatic individuals or any other individuals advised by local public health staff to take a test – and will open a digital booking portal. In the event of a specific outbreak within a higher education setting, it may be possible, depending on availability, for mobile testing units to be dispatched for the specific use of students and staff.

## What to do if you test positive

Anyone who has symptoms – or who lives in the same household as someone with symptoms – should continue to self-isolate while waiting for the results of their test.

If their test result is positive, it is essential to continue self-isolating to prevent transmitting the virus to other people. The person who has tested positive must continue to self-isolate for 10 days from when they first developed symptoms – or longer if they still have a high temperature. However, if coronavirus symptoms get worse it is important that they seek medical attention. Other members of their household must continue to self-isolate for 14 days from symptom onset. There is guidance at

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/what-to-do-if-symptoms-get-worse/>.

Self-isolating means staying at home and not going outside your home for any reason.

## Contact tracing

NHS Test and Trace helps trace close recent contacts of anyone who tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) and, if necessary, notifies them that they must self-isolate at home to help stop the spread of the virus.

HE providers should make sure that students, staff and anyone else who visits their settings are aware of how the contact tracing process works. They should also help promote the importance of sharing information promptly with NHS Test and Trace, if someone tests positive, and the importance of self-isolating if asked to do so in order to help stop the spread of the virus.

NHS Test and Trace asks anyone ordering a test to provide details of people who they have been in close contact with. A close 'contact' is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). This is any time from two

days before the person was symptomatic up to seven days from the onset of symptoms (this is when they are infectious to others).

A ['close' contact is defined](#) as someone who:

- spends significant time in the same household as someone who has tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19)
- is a sexual partner of someone who has tested positive
- has been within 2 metres of someone who has tested positive for more than 15 minutes
- has been within 1 metre of someone who has tested positive for more than one minute
- has had face-to-face contact (within one metre) of someone who has tested positive, including being coughed on
- has had skin-to-skin physical contact with someone who has tested positive
- has travelled in a small vehicle with someone who has tested positive or sat near someone who has tested positive in a large vehicle or plane

You should ensure that you are sharing this key information as part of your coronavirus (COVID-19) communications strategy. Further information is available in the [guidance for people who have had close contact with someone who has coronavirus](#).

It is important that those living in residential settings (halls of residence or houses of multiple occupation) understand when their household should self-isolate. The following resource may be useful for students and you should share this as part of your coronavirus (COVID-19) communication strategy:

- [Guidance for students living in halls of residence or houses of multiple occupation](#)

Published guidance sets out that organisations in certain sectors should collect details and maintain records of staff, customers and visitors on their premises to support NHS Test and Trace.

## **Customer and visitor logs for designated venues**

Designated sectors are legally required to collect details and maintain records of staff, customers and visitors on their premises to support NHS Test and Trace. This means that NHS Test and Trace can contact people if, for instance, there is an outbreak linked to those premises and give them appropriate public health advice. The new NHS COVID-19 app will give app users an alternative option of checking into venues by scanning a QR code, which will enable NHS Test and Trace to send notifications to app users. These notifications will not mention the name of the venue, but that the app user has recently been to a venue where they may have come into contact with coronavirus.

These sectors include hospitality, leisure, close contact services and places of worship, including all restaurants, bars, pubs, gyms, hairdressers and barbers. Further information can be seen here:

- [Guidance for maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors](#)

## Higher education provider-led testing programmes

HE providers may wish to introduce their own internal testing programmes for students and staff alongside NHS Test and Trace.

It is a **voluntary decision** for providers to run testing programmes for their staff and students and we do not expect this to be a service offered by all higher education providers. HE providers should ensure they are fully aware of the implications, both clinical and organisational, of introducing testing programmes and of the potential limitations of any tests or test services they use. It is recommended that all provider led testing regimes work in conjunction with their local Health Protection Teams and directors of public health and NHS Test and Trace, especially where they involve new and innovative approaches or technologies to ensure these programmes are as reliable and effective as possible.

Where providers are considering – or are already running testing programmes – they should follow the industry best practice for pathology testing, and ensure they meet all the legal and regulatory obligations required for testing for COVID-19.

If testing programmes are to test students, organisations must consider the existing legal obligations, including those relating to health and safety, employment, data protection or equalities appropriate to their situation (e.g. age of students) and should get independent legal advice.

Under the Health Protection (Notification) Regulations 2010 it is a legal requirement to report cases of COVID-19, or any other notifiable disease, to PHE and any laboratory found not to be adherent to this practice maybe subject to fines. All laboratories, be they public or private, have this statutory duty.

Data on all cases reported to PHE is held in PHE's Second Generation Surveillance System (SGSS). Data from SGSS is fed into the NHS Test and Trace system and is part of the information shared with local authorities on cases in their area.

Provider-led testing programmes do not excuse providers from following broader national measures, including:

- following the [guidance for employers and businesses on coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) on COVID-19 protective measures in the workplace
- ensuring staff and students are aware of NHS Test and Trace and how to access it



- supporting staff and students to self-isolate if they or a household member have symptoms of, or have tested positive for, COVID-19 or if they are advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace
- following HSE's guidance on [working safely during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)

## Healthcare students

Healthcare students can access the testing channels mentioned above in the usual way. There is no requirement for healthcare students to be tested prior to placement. However, NHS trusts may wish to test healthcare students as part of their local approach to testing non-symptomatic staff but this is a local decision.

Healthcare students are encouraged to sign up to the SIREN study. SIREN is an [NIHR urgent public health priority study](#) which has a primary objective of determining if prior SARS-CoV-2 infection in health care workers confers future immunity to re-infection. It will also allow organisations to estimate the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in healthcare workers and utilise this information to determine wider staff testing.

Healthcare students should speak with their trust should they wish to enrol.

## NHS Test and Trace app

NHS Test and Trace is currently trialling a new app on the Isle of Wight, in the London Borough of Newham and with NHS volunteer responders across England. The app has been designed to work alongside existing contact tracing services and testing, to help people to understand if they are at risk of infection so they can take action to protect themselves and their communities. It uses the latest in security technology and is designed with user privacy in mind so that it tracks the virus, not people. Further guidance will be provided when the app is rolled out more widely.



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