

Guidance Pooled testing for coronavirus (COVID-19) pilot: guidance for university students

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What pooled testing is

Pooled testing is a safe and effective way of testing swab samples from several people at the same time. Several swab samples are combined into one plastic tube and are processed together to detect COVID-19.

Why pooled testing important is

Pooled testing is an important part of the National Testing Programme as it can increase the amount of testing we can do for everyone. It allows labs to test more samples, in the same time, with fewer resources. This means more people can be tested quicker.

By testing asymptomatic individuals, we are more likely to identify outbreaks earlier and as a result reduce the transmission of the virus. Through appropriate action, including re-testing and isolation, we can reduce infection in your community.

It's important to test asymptomatic individuals as around half of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 show no symptoms, and are unaware that they are infected at all. If you have COVID-19 and no symptoms, you can still spread the virus to others.

Who is taking part in this pilot and why

This type of testing is mostly used where we expect the majority of test results to come back negative.

Pooled testing should only be done with people who do not have COVID-19 symptoms.

If you have coronavirus symptoms, you will need to be tested individually.

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back
- a new, continuous cough – this mean coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal

Most people with COVID-19 have at least one of these symptoms.

You should also not use pooled testing if you have ever tested positive for coronavirus.

How pooled testing fits with the roll-out of rapid result COVID-19 tests to students

The pooled testing pilot is separate from the roll-out of rapid result tests (also called lateral flow tests) to university students.

Rapid result (lateral flow) tests

Lateral flow antigen tests are a new kind of technology that do not require a laboratory to process the test. The roll-out of lateral flow tests to students ahead of the recommended travel window enables students to make informed decisions about their end of term travel plans.

Pooled testing pilot

The pooled testing pilot is exploring the use of pooled tests in student households as part of the development of a wider testing strategy for Test and Trace. It will help inform the longer term testing strategy for universities. It is anticipated that a long term testing strategy will involve mixed methods, such as both lateral flow tests and pooled testing, to manage potential outbreaks and support a return to normalcy.

Due to the timing of the pilot, students who have taken part in the pooling pilot will not need to complete an additional lateral flow test as they will have already been tested. As a result of the pooled test, students will either have a negative test result, or have completed a period of self-isolation due to a positive pooled test, enabling them to make an informed decision about when to travel.

How you will conduct testing

See (full instructions on how to conduct pooled testing) [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cohort-pool-testing-for-coronavirus-covid-19/pooled-testing-for-coronavirus-COVID-19-instructions]. Please make sure you have read the instructions before you conduct any testing.

You will be conducting pooled testing in groups of up to 5 people. If there are more than 5 people in your household, you will need to form several groups (e.g. if there are 8 people in your household, you will have to form a group of 5 and a group of 3, or two groups of 4).

You will need to select a lead student for each group who will collect the test kit(s) from the pick-up point, make sure testing is carried out properly, and return them once they are completed along with some personal data for each student in a pool that is used for test kit registration.

Testing will be self-administered and completed in your household. Please make sure that you follow all instructions given in order to successfully conduct the test.

Participating in this pilot

Participation is voluntary. Your university will provide you with a participation form. In order to take part in the pilot, you will need to agree to this participation form, as well as the relevant privacy notice provided by your university. This will allow your university admin team to provide you with the test and enable the team to register the test on your behalf.

Information the lead student will need to provide to the university

The university will use the following details for each student participating in the pooled test in order to register the test:

- first name and last name
- date of birth
- gender
- ethnic group (optional)
- address (first line and post code)
- country
- NHS number (optional)
- email address
- mobile number (optional)

Your university admin team will advise you how to provide the details necessary to register the kit. Additionally, when you drop off your completed test kits, the university will need to know:

- the barcode number of the pool test kit
- date and time of the pooled test

Collection and return of tests

Your university will contact you to inform you of the process for collecting and returning these test kits.

Meaning of pooled test results

Results will be communicated to you (each student) individually. The result you receive will be for the whole pool (the result is the same for each individual in the pool).

If your result is negative, there is no need for further action.

If your result is positive, everyone in your group will need to isolate and be individually retested as soon as possible, in line with guidance. You will also need to inform your university per their established COVID-19 guidance.

If your group has received an unclear result, you will need to be individually retested as soon as possible, in line with guidance. You do not need to isolate while awaiting retest results in the case of an unclear pooled test.

Retesting is important as it allows for the identification of which individuals were positive within the positive group(s).

Retesting options

You can [apply for a new individual test](#). This could be a home test kit or by attending a test site in person.

Retesting option

You cannot use a rapid results COVID-19 test as your retesting option. The pooled test kits contain a different type of test (PCR) to the rapid results tests (lateral flow test) being made available to universities. At this point in time, an individual who receives a positive pooled test result must get a follow up PCR test, not a lateral flow test.

Meaning of individual test results

If your result is negative, there is no need for further action.

If your result is positive, you and your whole household will need to immediately self-isolate, following national guidelines.

If your result is unclear, you will have to retest immediately. You can [apply for a new individual test](#). This could be a home test kit or by attending a test site in person.

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