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UK encourages England residents to opt for cost-free COVID-19 rapid test twice weekly

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Government announces access to free, regular, rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) testing from 9 April for everyone



UK government has announced access to free, regular, rapid coronavirus testing from 9 April to everyone in England.

In a significant step forward, which paves the way for businesses and society reopening, anyone will be able to access free, rapid lateral flow tests (LFDs) for themselves and their families to use twice a week, in line with clinical guidance.

Rapid testing has so far been available to those most at risk and people who need to leave home for work, including frontline NHS workers, care home staff and residents, and schoolchildren and their families. Now rapid testing will be offered to everyone, with people encouraged to take regular tests to help prevent outbreaks and reclaim a more normal way of life.

One in 3 people with COVID-19 do not experience any symptoms and may be spreading the virus unwittingly. Rapid testing detects cases quickly, meaning positive cases can isolate immediately. Since rapid testing was introduced, over 120,000 positive cases that would not have been found otherwise have already been identified by LFDs. By making rapid tests available to everyone, more cases will be detected, breaking chains of transmission and saving lives.

Alongside the rollout of the vaccine, regular testing is going to be an essential part of the easing of restrictions as it will help us quickly suppress the spread of variants. With the increase in testing, numbers government hopes to identify and control variants at the maximum rate.

The NHS COVID-19 app has been breaking chains of transmission to protect users and their communities since its launch in September, with over 22 million people downloading the app to date. Updates will be made to the NHS COVID-19 app in England to coincide with the offer of rapid testing for everyone.

The expanded regular testing offer for people without symptoms will be delivered through:

- a home ordering service, which allows people to order lateral flow tests online to be delivered to their home

- workplace testing programmes, on-site or at home
- community testing, offered by all local authorities
- collection at a local PCR test site during specific test collection time windows
- testing on-site at schools and colleges

A new ‘Pharmacy Collect’ service is also launching which will provide an additional route to regular testing. People aged over 18 without symptoms will be able to visit a participating local pharmacy and collect a box of 7 rapid tests to use twice a week at home.

If testing at home, individuals will need to register their results online or by calling 119. They should self-isolate if positive and order a confirmatory PCR test. Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should book a test online or by calling 119.

NHS COVID-19 app in England will be updated from 8 April in addition to New QR code posters. If an app user tests positive, they will be asked to share their venue history in a privacy-protecting way via the app. This will allow venue alerts to be generated more quickly, and improve the ability to identify where outbreaks are occurring and take steps to prevent the virus from spreading.