



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## Coronavirus FAQs – Testing

### Does Wales have a strategy for testing?

The Chief Medical Officer for Wales introduced [guidance](#) for coronavirus testing in Wales on 18 March, which set out who should be tested. An updated [policy](#), which extended testing to all critical workers was published on 18 April. A [national testing plan](#) for Wales was published on 7 April and outlined two main aims – to reduce the harm caused by coronavirus and to help the public and professionals get back to their normal daily lives.

A new [Test, Trace, Protect](#) strategy, which sets out the next phase of our approach to tackling coronavirus, has now been published. This covers our approach to testing people with symptoms in the community, tracing those they have come into close contact with, who may be at risk of having the virus, and protecting family, friends and our community by self-isolating.

### Does the *Test, Trace, Protect* strategy differ from other UK approaches?

Coronavirus will be with us until an effective vaccine is available or there is sufficient acquired immunity among the population. Research is ongoing in Wales to explore new treatments for the virus and the first vaccine trials have started in the UK.

We have, and we will continue, to base our approach on the best available scientific evidence, health surveillance and international learning. Contact tracing is a long-established public health approach to containing the spread of infectious diseases and has proven to be effective in other countries.

In Wales, we have a robust, national public health system, which puts us in a strong position as we move to the next phase of the virus and as we begin the gradual and cautious process of easing the lockdown restrictions. Our aim is to maintain a UK-wide approach.

### How will the *Test, Trace, Protect* strategy work?

*Test, Trace, Protect* will work by:

- Identifying those who have coronavirus symptoms, enabling them to be tested and to isolate from wider family, friends and their community. Testing will be available for the public. Further detail about how to access testing will be published shortly.
- Tracing those who have been in close contact with the symptomatic/tested person, asking them self-isolate.
- Providing advice and guidance, particularly if the person who has symptoms or their contacts are [in the shielding group or the at risk group](#).
- Ensuring that if the symptoms are not due to coronavirus, individuals and their contacts can get back to their normal routines as soon as possible.

## How will the strategy be delivered?

Delivering Test, Trace, Protect will require working closely across a number of public sector organisations to deliver one of the biggest public health interventions in a generation. Public Health Wales, health boards and local authorities will all help deliver this strategy.

The public will be our most important partners. It is only through their willingness to report their symptoms, identify their contacts and follow advice about self-isolating that we will be able to identify new cases and hotspots of coronavirus and prevent a new peak in cases occurring.

## What role does testing play in the *Test, Trace, Protect* strategy?

Testing for coronavirus has a number of purposes, it is vital for:

- Diagnosing the virus to help with treatment and care.
- Population health surveillance, so we understand the spread of the disease and can identify clusters and hot spots.
- Contact tracing, to control the spread of the virus.
- Business continuity, helping critical workers to return to work more quickly and safely
- When the antibody test is available, it will help us identify who has had coronavirus

Testing will be extended beyond people in hospital, residents in care homes, and critical workers, to include the public. This will either be through self-referral or as a result of being identified through contact tracing.

## How do I book a test if I am a critical worker?

The process for booking a test if you are a [critical worker](#) is as follows:

- **Health boards and NHS trusts** have their own processes for booking tests. Healthcare workers displaying symptoms should continue to speak to their occupational health team for advice on how to access a test.
- **Social care** worker referrals for testing are coordinated via the local authorities or local resilience forums (LRFs). Care homes can refer symptomatic workers for testing as part of the [testing process for care home residents](#)
- For the moment, all other **critical workers** should continue to follow local operational referral arrangements in place, [details available here](#). These local referral arrangements will be replaced with a new self-service booking portal. Details will be available soon.

## How will we scale up the approach to testing?

We have already extended our infrastructure in Wales, increasing the number of mass-drive through testing centres, introducing eight new mobile swab units and developing a network of community testing units.

As we implement the Test Trace Protect strategy, home testing kits and end-to-end testing booking and results system will be introduced. This will involve joining up with the UK-wide web-based booking platforms and processing systems already in place.

Working closely with our UK counterparts we will be able to rapidly scale up our existing testing policy for critical workers, broaden testing to include members of the public,

implementing an effective symptom reporting system, conducting proximity tracking, contact tracing, and health surveillance.

### **How will we ensure there is sufficient capacity for testing in Wales?**

The scale of testing capacity needed in Wales to support this approach is unprecedented. We have significantly expanded our testing capacity with laboratory capacity currently available to process more than 5,000 tests a day, and with testing centres now open around Wales.

We will continue to increase this capacity over the coming weeks and months, to ~~as many~~ as 10,000 tests a day, enabling us to test more people staying in hospitals and care settings and those working in these sectors and in other critical services.

As we move to mass population testing to support contact tracing, we will also draw on the testing programme operating across the UK, with systems in place to ensure that data is retained in Wales. Using this additional capacity also brings the benefit of being able to have tests delivered to people's home for them to self-administer.

Contact tracing combined with the other purposes that testing supports could require as many as 20,000 tests a day, but this is ~~highly~~ dependent on the spread of the disease, the prevalence of symptoms and the emerging evidence on how testing can best be deployed to prevent infection. We will continue to keep this evidence under review and adapt our estimates of need accordingly.

### **How do you test for coronavirus?**

Because infected people may have anything from mild respiratory symptoms to severe pneumonia, the only way to confirm someone has coronavirus is to test them.

There is currently one type of test in regular use – the antigen (swab) test which is used to test whether someone with symptoms has coronavirus. The antigen test looks for the presence of the genetic signature of the virus, with the test performed in a laboratory. The type of test processed through Welsh laboratories involves a 'single dry swab' taken from the back of the throat. The type of test processed through English laboratories involves 'two wet swab' sample collections taken from the nose and throat.

Another type of test is possible – this is the antibody test. This tests a drop of the blood to see whether someone has been exposed to coronavirus infection and has developed antibodies – has some immunity to the virus. This test is also performed in the laboratory but it can be adapted into a testing format for community use. At the moment, the antibody test is not available for widespread use in the UK – work is ongoing to verify the reliability and effectiveness of the test. It is hoped an effective form of the antibody test will be confirmed, which can be used in the community to track the progression of coronavirus.

Once the antibody test has been validated, it will be available for use in Wales.

### **Where can I get the latest data about tests?**

Public Health Wales launched an [interactive dashboard](#) with the latest data relating to coronavirus in Wales.

Weekly updates are also [published here](#) on the number and results of coronavirus tests, who was tested and where they were tested.

May 14, 2020

## **What is contact tracing and how will this work?**

Contact tracing is a tried and tested method of controlling the spread of infectious diseases. It will also help us prevent and understand how the disease is passing from person to person. We used contact tracing during the initial 'contain' phase of our response to coronavirus.

A digital platform for contact tracing across Wales is being developed. This will allow people to simply and quickly report their contacts, helping contact tracing teams to work effectively, and providing real time intelligence across the whole of Wales on the coverage of the disease, how quickly it is spreading, and where there are hotspots of infection.

Contact tracing will be delivered regionally through health boards. They will provide local co-ordination and work in partnership with local authorities and other public services deploy contact tracing teams who understand the local context. This will help to speed up contact tracing activity, and to identify new trends or local clusters of the disease as early as possible.

A UK-wide digital app will also be available.

## **What role can I play to protect myself, my family, friends and community?**

Testing and contact tracing is not an end in itself. We will need people to continue to play their part and follow the latest public health guidance.

The symptoms of coronavirus are a high temperature and a new, persistent cough. If you think you might have coronavirus, do not call 111 or go to a hospital or your local GP surgery because you could infect other people.

You should stay at home for seven days if you have symptoms. If you live with someone who has symptoms but you are well, you should self-isolate for 14 days.

If you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home or if your condition gets worse, or your symptoms do not get better after seven days, use the 111 online coronavirus service. If you do not have internet access, call 111.

In a medical emergency, dial 999.