

Date: 11/03/21

Expansion of the workplace testing offer

Many of you may have seen the testing explainer comms MHCLG issued on 16 February where we committed to providing further information when available.

Changes to the existing workplace testing offer

Following the publication of the roadmap on 22 February, the Government's offer of free test kits to workplaces for staff who cannot work at home has been extended until the end of June 2021. However, organisations, including those yet to open following the lifting of restrictions, will need to register interest and order their free tests before 31 March 2021. There is no obligation for businesses that register and start testing to continue providing tests to employees after the end of June.

Through this extended offer, NHS Test & Trace will continue to support organisations to deliver scalable asymptomatic testing through provision of a digital solution, clinical protocols, supply of tests kits, guidance and training.

On 6 March DHSC published a press release which confirmed the expansion of the workplace testing offer to include organisations with fewer than 50 employees, meaning all businesses in England with workers who need to leave their home to work are encouraged to make plans to support their workers to access regular testing for those without symptoms.

Businesses can find out more about rapid workplace testing and register their interest ahead of 31 March deadline by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/get-workplace-coronavirus-tests>. Businesses will be provided with all the information they need to plan and deliver their testing programme, along with promotional materials. NHS Test & Trace are also running a series of webinars over the coming weeks in order to provide businesses with further information on the workplace testing offer. Dates and links to these events are attached.

Testing via other routes

Where it may not be practical for businesses to establish workplace testing sites, for those with smaller or dispersed workforces, in addition to scaling up employer-led testing, testing continues to be delivered locally by local authorities in England under the Community Testing Programme.

Alongside Community Testing delivered by Local Authorities, two new channels have been launched which will provide eligible members of the public with access to rapid lateral flow self-test kits through the following routes:

Community Collect: New channel which will enable twice-weekly testing based on a model of collecting rapid lateral flow self-test kits from an NHS Test and Trace test site or a community testing site and used at home.

Direct to Home: New channel with capacity to deliver lateral flow self-test kits directly to people's homes. This channel was launched on the 1 March 2021, and initially is open only to individuals where someone from their household (or bubble) goes to a school or college, or works for one.

Pharmacy Collect: This channel has not yet been launched, but it is being scaled up at pace to utilise pharmacies as a place where people will be able to collect rapid lateral flow self-test kits.

Where organisations can access asymptomatic testing more effectively through asymptomatic testing sites and emerging home testing models these can continue to be considered for testing through this channel. More information can be found by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/find-covid-19-lateral-flow-test-site>.

Plans for Workplace self-test collect

The ambition from DHSC remains to rollout use of home testing as another option for workforces to get access to testing. On 22 February DHSC launched home collect pilots with five companies. The ambition is for these pilots to inform roll out of this model of distributing tests more widely. Under this model, eligible businesses will be able to provide lateral flow tests for their employees to collect, for them to conduct at home.

We know that many organisations in your sectors have more dispersed workforces, so this more flexible option is likely to better fit their needs. We will therefore continue to make the case for this option to be rolled out more widely as soon as possible and will provide a further update when more information is available. However, we would recommend that organisations in your sectors consider registering and accessing free tests through the existing programme until clarity is provided on wider rollout of this route. As mentioned above, joining the programme now does not create any commitment in the longer term.

Your feedback and queries

In order to continue informing government testing policy, we welcome your views on the various approaches to testing, including what works best for your organisation/sector and any challenges you are facing with registration or implementation of testing arrangements.

To provide feedback, or for any general queries about how options for testing might work in practice for workforces in your organisation/sector, please contact: MHCLGTestingEnquiries@communities.gov.uk.

If you are an employer (private or public) and have specific questions relating to workplace testing, then please email p-andpsector@dhsc.gov.uk.