

Asymptomatic Testing in Primary Schools, School-Based Nurseries and Local Authority Maintained Nurseries

Frequently asked questions

Schools can use these answers to frequently asked questions to respond to queries in their own settings. You should tailor these answers to your setting prior to sharing.

Aims and Objectives of Asymptomatic Testing

What are the objectives of the Government's asymptomatic testing strategy in education settings?

The Government's asymptomatic testing strategy will help to break the chains of transmission of coronavirus (Covid-19) in education settings by identifying asymptomatic positive cases. Those who test positive will then self-isolate, helping to reduce transmission of the virus.

The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace the Government's current testing policy for those with symptoms. Primary school, junior school, schools-based nursery and maintained nursery school staff who experience symptoms of Covid-19 should self-isolate immediately and arrange a test.

Why are you continuing with testing primary school staff despite the decision to close schools and colleges to most pupils from 5 January?

Attendance at schools and colleges is currently limited to staff, vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

Many primary staff are currently working on school sites providing education to all pupils, whether at home or in school. Asymptomatic testing will help protect everyone by identifying as soon as possible those who have Covid-19 but no symptoms and need to self-isolate.

Why is asymptomatic testing being introduced?

Up to one in three people who have the virus have it without symptoms (they are asymptomatic) so could be spreading the disease unknowingly. Rapid asymptomatic testing means that we can now introduce testing of staff twice a week.

This is a significant development that will help to identify positive cases more quickly and break the chains of transmissions. Primary schools, junior schools, maintained nursery schools and schools-based nurseries must continue to put in place a range of protective measures to minimise the risk of infection spread.

Adults and young people that fall into the clinically extremely vulnerable group should continue to follow the [Guidance on shielding and protecting extremely vulnerable persons](#).

Is participation compulsory?

The Department for Education expects all primary schools, junior schools, school-based nurseries and maintained nurseries will want to participate and offer at home test kits to staff. It is voluntary for staff to participate.

Once staff understand the testing process and read a privacy notice, if they choose to participate they are committing to self-administer the test and provide their results. Schools should ensure that staff provide their results (positive, negative or void) to NHS Test and Trace via the [self-report gov.uk page](#). Results should also be shared with school / nursery to support local contact tracing.

Staff who decline to participate can still attend school or nursery. Staff who decline to participate in this testing programme should follow the usual national guidelines on self-isolation and anyone should [get tested](#) if they show symptoms.

What settings are included in this testing programme?

All staff working in primary settings:

- local-authority-maintained schools - including mainstream, special and pupil referral units (PRUs)
- academies - including special academies and alternative provision free schools
- junior schools
- non-maintained special schools
- independent schools - including independent special schools and independent alternative provision
- hospital schools

Staff working in school-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools are also included.

Staff working in 'all-through schools' and middle schools should be tested through the secondary school testing programme.

Pupils' Return to Primary Schools

Why have pupils' return to schools been delayed?

During the period of national lockdown, primary schools are open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers only. This will help

support the reduction of the overall number of social contacts in our communities. We have resisted restrictions on attendance at schools since the first lockdown but, in the face of the rapidly rising numbers of cases across the country and intense pressure on the NHS, we now need to use every lever at our disposal to reduce all our social contacts wherever possible. It is vital to do everything possible to tackle these trends whilst prioritising education.

We know that receiving face-to-face education is best for children's mental health and for their educational achievement. We will continue to review the restrictions on schools and will ensure that children return to face-to-face education as soon as possible.

Why are primary staff being tested and not primary children like in secondary settings?

This is considerably more challenging than testing in secondary schools/colleges, both because of the age of the pupils and the number of schools. Primary age pupils are unable to self-swab. Because of this and the larger size of the primary sector it is not feasible to set up asymptomatic test sites in each primary school as we have in the secondary sector. We are looking into options to pilot and further announcements will be made in due course.

What about all through schools and middle schools?

All through schools and middle schools will be covered by the secondary testing programme.

Early years

Which EY settings are included as part of the primary school testing rollout?

School-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools are included in the primary school testing rollout, although Maintained Nurseries will receive their deliveries slightly later.

What about Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers?

We encourage local authorities to prioritise appropriate testing for early years staff via Community Testing programmes, which now covers all local authorities. Given the very large numbers of early years settings in the country, this is currently the best way to ensure that some early years settings such as private and voluntary nurseries can access asymptomatic testing for their staff. LAs are in different stages of delivering community testing, and some LAs may need to reprioritise tests in areas where there are higher risks of transmission.

I'm a maintained nursery: can we test staff on site since staff are in school more often than in primaries?

No, school-based and maintained nursery schools are being issued with kits for use at home as part of the primary testing programme. Using these kits at home is recommended because if the test is positive, the risk of transmission on site is reduced.

Why are some early years settings included in the primary programme but not others?

The most efficient way of providing asymptomatic testing to some of the EY sector is to include schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools in the primary school rollout. We are continuing to work closely with colleagues across government and local authorities to secure the most effective approach to asymptomatic testing for the whole of the EY sector. This includes ongoing discussions about providing testing via the education testing programme as well as encouraging local authorities to consider prioritising appropriate testing for PVI and childminders via the Community Testing Programme, which is now available to all local authorities.

Testing

How will the testing work?

Primary school staff (including staff in schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools) will be supplied with at home Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test kits which they will be able to use twice weekly 3-4 days apart before coming into work, ideally in the morning. The LFDs supplied do not require laboratory processing and can provide a quick result in about 30 minutes.

Testing is not mandatory for individuals and they will not need to produce a negative test result, or provide proof of having taken a test, to return to work in person. However, testing is strongly encouraged.

LFD tests have been widely and successfully used to detect asymptomatic COVID-19 cases. The speed and convenience of the tests supports the detection of the virus in asymptomatic individuals, who would not otherwise have got tested. LFD tests are approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and are crucial in the fight against the virus.

The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace current testing policy for those with symptoms. Anyone with symptoms, whether they are involved in the asymptomatic testing programme or not, will still be expected to obtain a PCR test and follow NHS Test and Trace Guidance, self-isolating until they have received their results.

Schools and staff must continue with all current protective measures – asymptomatic testing does not replace these controls or make these less important in controlling the virus.

How accurate is a lateral flow device test?

Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests have been widely and successfully used to detect COVID-19 in asymptomatic individuals. No test is perfect, but the speed and convenience of LFD tests supports detection of the virus in asymptomatic individuals who would not otherwise be tested. LFD tests are approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and are crucial in the fight against the virus.

Extensive clinical evaluation has been carried out on the lateral flow tests. Evaluations from Public Health England and the University of Oxford show these tests are accurate and sensitive enough to be used in the community for screening and surveillance purposes.

LFD tests identify individuals with the early stage of infectiousness and with the highest infectivity. These individuals tend to spread the virus to many people and so identifying by LFD remains important.

It is important to remember that these tests are an additional layer of health protection measure in addition to face coverings, social distancing etc.

How often should primary and early years staff take a test?

Staff should take the test twice weekly at home 3-4 days apart.

Do staff working from home need to take a test if they never attend school/nursery in person?

No: the test kits are only for those working on school / nursery premises that might unknowingly infect others.

Will we have to opt in to receive the test kit supplies?

As part of its operational guidance, DHSC has set out a legal agreement with terms and conditions that schools will agree to by participating. The Primary Schools Agreement Mass Testing Rollout is available on the primary [schools document sharing platform](#). No specific steps need to be taken to sign-up to receive the first delivery of test kits. Primary schools, school-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools can expect to receive their initial test kit supplies from w/c 18 January. Further information will be provided about replenishment of these supplies. Testing should commence from w/c 25 January.

How should schools distribute the supply of test kits?

It is advisable that staff are given allocated time slots for collecting their test kits to maintain social distancing and to avoid queues and crowding. Staff who

distribute kits and those collecting kits should maintain social distancing and wear appropriate face covering in line with national guidance.

How should headteachers/nursery leaders brief their staff?

Leaders may want to take staff through the materials supplied on the document sharing portal and testing instructions for use (v 1.3.2), including the 'How to Guide' and the 'how to self test' video, as a group to give consistent messaging. The format of the briefing should comply with national guidelines on social distancing.

What should you do if you are contacted by NHS Test and Trace?

Staff who are contacted by NHS Test and Trace as a contact of someone who has coronavirus, will need to self-isolate immediately following current public health guidance.

Anyone who displays symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can and should get a PCR test. Tests can be booked online through the [NHS website](#) or ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to the internet.

Why can't secondary schools give their LFDs to primary schools?

LFDs supplied to primary schools are test kits manufactured specifically for self-testing at home and are accompanied by specific instructions for use in this setting.

Secondary LFDs have different instructions for use on site and should not be used at home.

All-through schools should have received sufficient test kits to test all of their workforce (not matter what age they teach) and to be used as part of their Asymptomatic Test Site (ATS). If an all-through received home test kits, this is a mistake and they should not open them and contact the DfE.

Will all-through schools, and special schools with provision across the phases, receive home-tests kit for their teachers working at primary? How will this be determined (given some teach across phases)?

Any schools with a mix of primary- and secondary-aged pupils should follow the secondary school testing procedures for staff outlined in the Government's guidance. All staff, including those working solely with primary-aged pupils, should therefore be tested twice a week in school and these schools will not be issued with home testing kits for staff members. We are working with our suppliers to ensure that these schools receive sufficient kits to test all staff.

If all through schools receive delivery of home testing kits for their primary staff, this is an error. They should not open the kits as they will be collected. They should not open the kits as they will be collected. Test at home kits say 'self-administered' and each box contains a set of 7 tests. Boxes for use in Asymptomatic Test Sites (ATS) contain a set of 25 tests.

I'm a primary school and we prefer to test our staff on site, can we?

No. Primary schools have been issued with self-test kits for staff to use at home.

Why can't secondary staff take the LFD kits home?

Secondary LFDs have specific instructions for use on site and should not be used at home. Home test kits are manufactured specifically for testing at home and are accompanied by specific instructions for use in this setting.

Testing: general

Will the existing testing service remain open?

The Government's normal testing service for symptomatic individuals will continue. This is the foundation of our testing strategy. It is the most effective way to know if staff are positive and need to self-isolate. If staff have symptoms, they should continue to book a test via the [NHS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) service](#) or by calling 119 in England and Wales, or 0300 303 2713 in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Can my family get tested too?

No, this asymptomatic LFD testing is aimed at staff in primary and junior schools including those in schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools. The tests will be handed to staff for personal use and should not be used for anyone else. Family members of staff taking part are not eligible. If family members experience COVID-19 symptoms, they must follow standard Government guidance, including self-isolating immediately and booking a test through the [NHS Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) service](#) or by calling 119 (England and Wales).

Why should I get tested if I have no symptoms?

Lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others. By taking a test, staff will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives.

Should someone who has been vaccinated take a LFD test?

Yes, we do not yet know whether vaccines prevent individuals transmitting the virus.

Why would I take the test? If positive, I will have to self-isolate. Why would I take the risk?

Lateral flow tests are designed to detect the level of virus in individuals who do not experience and show any symptoms, but who could still be infectious and pass the virus to others. By taking a test, staff will help to stop the spread of the virus, protect other people, and save lives.

This will also mean that staff can continue going to work if they test negative using the at-home LFD tests. By detecting more asymptomatic cases, schools can avoid unnecessary staff shortages through staff unwittingly infecting others.

What impact does this testing have on protective measures on schools?

All existing protective measures set out in [guidance](#) (e.g. social distancing, handwashing, face coverings where needed, bubbles) remain important and the need for these is not lessened. A negative LFD result should not be read as a means to relax or ignore social distancing or other virus prevention measures intended to reduce transmission – LFD is an additional tool that contributes to reducing risk.

Components of LFD tests

Are the swabs latex free?

The manufacturer has confirmed that Innova swabs are latex free.

Does the LFD test contain any harmful substances and are there any precautions for dealing with spillages?

Extraction solution which comes with the LFD test kit contains the following components: Na_2HPO_4 (disodium hydrogen phosphate), NaH_2PO_4 (sodium phosphate monobasic), NaCl (Sodium Chloride). These components do not have any hazard labels associated with them, and the manufacturer states that there are no hazards anticipated if individuals follow the instructions for use.

Any spillages should be wiped with a paper towel and if the solution included the throat and nose sample, the area should be appropriately disinfected using household disinfectant.

Do the LFD tests contain animal products or have they been tested on animals?

All of the antibodies are necessarily generated from animal cells. While we do not test any of these products on animals, nor are animals harmed in the development process, the antibodies used for the test reaction are derived using an animal cell in the laboratory. The T line for a positive test is derived by reaction between the sample as it flows to the membrane (thin paper like

material inside the device) which is coated with these antibodies. It is therefore highly unlikely for there to be any direct contact between the person being tested and the animal material itself. However, we want to make sure that the people undertaking the test make an informed choice about this.

Are the LFD tests vegan?

The monoclonal antibody technology present in our lateral flow devices are generated from animal cells. During development, at no time have any component parts been tested on animals.

Are the LFD tests halal?

No animal products have been used in the production of the swabs. The swab is the only material with which the individual will come into direct contact. The individual using the test will not come into direct contact with any materials made from animal products.

The thin paper like material inside the LFD is coated with antibodies from animal cells. No direct contact will be made between the person and this material. The monoclonal antibody technology present in our lateral flow devices are generated from animal cells. This is in common with other tests of this kind, including commercially available pregnancy tests.

Is the LFD test safe for those that are pregnant?

Yes, the tests are safe to use by those who are pregnant.

Supplies

Our boxes have arrived! Does each blue box only contain 1 test kit? Or do we open them to reveal more than one in each little blue box?

Each individual box has 7 tests. Please give one box of 7 per staff member plus the new Instructions For Use.

How do we reorder supplies?

The test kits are expected to last up to three and a half weeks based on staff testing twice a week. We will communicate further on the how to reorder in due course.

What happens if we are not able to receive the delivery for some reason?

The delivery partner will reattempt delivery in the next possible timeslot.

What do I do if my school/nursery has not received their kit?

If you have not received your delivery by Wednesday 27 January, please complete this [contact form](#). You will need the URN for your school to complete this form. We are planning to begin deliveries to maintained nursery schools from week commencing 1 February.

Test process: results

What happens if a staff member's lateral flow test result is negative?

Staff with a negative LFD result can continue to attend school or nursery after logging their result with NHS T & T. We recommend that they also inform their school or nursery of their result. Individuals who test negative must continue to follow national and local guidelines including regular handwashing, social distancing and wearing face coverings, where required.

If an individual has a negative LFD test taken at home, can they end self-isolation?

No, individuals must continue to self-isolate. The at home LFD tests are not approved to allow release from self-isolation.

What happens if a staff member's lateral flow test result is positive?

Individuals with a positive LFD result will need to self-isolate immediately in line with the [stay-at-home guidance](#). They should report their results to NHS Test and Trace as soon as the test is complete, as set out in the test kit instructions and [self-report gov.uk page](#). This will enable NHS Test and Trace to monitor the spread of the virus.

They should also inform their school or nursery of their result so the school can identify close contacts and they can make appropriate cover arrangements. They must book a confirmatory PCR test online, then continue to isolate for 10 days (from the day the symptoms started) if the PCR test result is positive. The staff member should also inform their school or nursery of a positive PCR result.

What should happen to contacts of staff who have a positive LFD test and a positive confirmatory PCR test?

Schools should follow their existing policy in identifying close contacts of positive cases that would need to self-isolate.

What happens if a staff member's lateral flow test result is void/invalid?

If staff get a void result, this means that the test has not run correctly, and they will need to take another test as soon as possible, ideally on the same day. Staff should still report the void result to NHS Test and Trace via the [self-](#)

[report.gov.uk page](#). They should use a new test kit but not reuse anything from the first kit. In the very unlikely event staff get two void test results, they should book a PCR test. In this instance, staff do not need to self-isolate pending the result of the PCR test. Staff should inform their school/nursery as it may indicate a faulty batch of test kits.

Do test results get affected by brushing teeth, drinking water?

Avoid eating or drinking half an hour before the test. A small amount of water is acceptable. There is unlikely to be an adverse impact of brushing teeth prior to testing but it might be prudent to wait a while before testing.

What record keeping does the school or nursery need to do?

Schools/nurseries should keep a test kit log, where they record which individual has taken which kits home. This is required in the unlikely event of an incident requiring investigation or batch recall. This log will also help record that staff have received the new instructions for use. This must be separate from the results register for data protection reasons. A template is provided on the document sharing platform [here](#).

Schools/nurseries should also keep a record of staff tests results. This will help with contact tracing, since schools/nurseries cannot view staff results otherwise. A template record is provided on the document sharing platform [here](#).

If the individual follows the instructions in the home test kits, they must then record and share their result (whether positive, negative or void) with NHS Test and Trace.

How and when do I report my result to NHS Test & Trace?

Individuals should ensure that they provide their result (positive, negative or void) to NHS Test and Trace. There are two ways staff can report their result. They can report online by visiting www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result. Alternatively they can report via telephone - Lines are open every day, 7am to 11pm. +England, Wales and Northern Ireland: 119; Scotland: 0300 303 2713.

Why do I need to share information on LFD test results both with NHS Test & Trace and my school?

It is a requirement to share results with NHS Test & Trace so that contact tracing (particularly outside the school environment can take place) and clinical evaluation of the testing programme can continue. Staff should share results with their school so that if positive, immediate contact tracing can take place in school. Void and negative results are useful information for their school both to monitor stocks of kits and to identify any particular issues that might need escalating to DfE or NHS Test & Trace.

How should staff members dispose of their kit?

Once their test is complete, staff should put all of the used test contents in the small waste bag provided. They should seal the bag and put the bag in their bin at home – it is classified as general household waste.

Should I still take part in the asymptomatic testing programme if I have recently tested positive for COVID-19?

If staff have recently (within 90 days) tested positive for COVID-19, they are likely to have developed some immunity to the virus. However, we are not yet certain whether individuals can still spread the virus to others. Given the current prevalence of the virus and the pressing need to reduce transmission, we encourage staff to take an LFD test regardless of whether they have tested positive previously as this is a good indicator of high viral load, and therefore infectiousness. If staff have recently tested positive for COVID-19, they should complete their period of isolation before returning to school or nursery and resume twice-weekly testing. If symptoms (other than cough or a loss of, or change in, normal sense of taste or smell) persist, this could be longer than the normal 10-day self-isolation period for confirmed cases. This is described in [stay-at-home guidance](#) for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Equipment

How will staff know what do to with the at home test kits?

Detailed information how to self-swab and process the tests is in the Instructions for Use (please check this is version 1.3.2 – dated 15 January 2021). Tests can be disposed of in the waste bag provided and then put in general household waste bins.

How and when will test kits/ be provided – what will be provided and how will stocks be replenished?

Primary schools, schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools will initially receive a deliveries of test kits from the 18th January. They will be delivered by Bidfood or Brakes. These test kits are for the twice weekly at home testing of staff. Staff will be able to order additional test kits throughout the testing period as required, and the Department for Education will issue further guidance on this shortly. The number of test kits that each school/nursery will receive has been estimated based on the number of staff.

What specific storage arrangements are required for the test kits?

The temperature for storing LFD test kits is between 2°C and 30°C. The LFD devices and reagents must be used between 15°C and 30°C during use so

must not be stored outside. If they are stored somewhere colder than 15°C, then move them to a room temperature area for around 30 minutes before use.

Consent

Do you need consent to process the personal data required for testing?

Primary schools, schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools will need to satisfy themselves that they have a lawful basis for processing personal data. Primary schools will provide staff with a privacy notice explaining what personal data is required to participate in the programme.

Workforce, funding and insurance

How are staff defined in primary schools, schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools?

The primary, schools-based nursery and maintained nursery school workforce includes all staff who are working in these settings including contractors or peripatetic staff. Schools and nurseries should also offer testing to other staff members, such as clinical practitioners, therapists, other support staff, caterers or volunteers. Some staff (particularly those employed through the NHS) may have separate arrangements for regular testing.

What are the duties of those undertaking the staff testing roles?

Prior to commencing their roles, staff must read the guidance and familiarise themselves with their roles. The two roles that each school or nursery will require are a 'Covid Coordinator and a 'Registration Assistant'.

The Covid Coordinator / Programme Management responsibilities cover the overall management of Covid self-testing programme at the school or nursery, including:

- engagement and communication with staff and parents
- ensuring staff are using the right instructions and that they sign for the test kits using the 'Test Kit Log'
- reporting incidents and carry out risk management
- storing and reporting any required data
- reordering tests when required (advice on how to do this will follow)

The Registration Assistant duties cover:

- distributing the correct number of test kits and managing the distribution schedule
- working with the Covid Coordinator/Programme manager to manage the stock of kits
- recording self-reported result for weekly testing on their COVID_19

- Test Register.
- sending reminders to staff [report their results online](#) and to their school or nursery
- responding to staff questions about testing

How long are staff expected to spend in these roles?

The size of the school and its workforce will dictate how long the activities set out under the Registration Assistant and Covid Coordinator roles take. It is advisable that staff are given allocated time slots for test-kit pick up, to maintain social distancing and to avoid queues and crowding. Therefore, we expect that the initial set-up, including registration of staff and distribution of tests, will take up to 2 days. We anticipate that the regular input of staff test results to the Covid-19 test register will take up to 1 day, spread over the course of a working week.

Will my school/nursery have costs reimbursed?

Primary school, junior school and schools-based nursery and maintained nursery school staff will be supplied with at home Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test kits which they will be able to use before coming into work. The home testing offer is intended to make the process as simple to manage as possible, minimising the demands placed on school and nursery workforces to deliver their staff testing programme. The responsibilities of the programme (Covid Coordinator and Registration Assistant) are intended to be integrated within existing staff or volunteer structures. We do not expect additional staffing costs to be incurred, as the administrative requirements for schools are relatively light. No further workforce, equipment or funding is therefore required for the administration of these tests; as a result, primary schools will not receive additional funding to carry out testing.

Has the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) or the insurance companies who work with primary schools, school-based or maintained nurseries confirmed that they would cover activities related to the asymptomatic testing programme, even if testing occurs at home?

The Risk Protection Arrangements (RPA) provides extensive public and employer's liability cover. The RPA would provide an indemnity to the member school for all sums that the member school shall become legally liable to pay for damages or compensation in respect of or arising out of personal injury or damage to third party property occurring during the period the member school is a member of the RPA and in connection with the testing. Cover applies during home testing as well as testing on school premises. Risk assessments are required whether the testing is on site or in a pupil or employees' home.

If schools are insured, they should check with their insurer or their insurance broker / agent in the first instance to check the extent of cover provided for testing in the employee's own home.

Training

How much training will staff members get?

All of the information needed to allow an individual to participate in testing is included in the instructions for them. Primary schools, schools-based nurseries and maintained nursery schools and their staff can find detailed information on how to self-swab and use the at home LFD tests in the following:

- 'instructions for use' handbook (v 1.3.2)
- 'how to' guide
- YouTube video series covering a 'step to step guide to covid-19 self testing'

Transport

What if staff need to travel to school on public transport?

Staff are being provided with at home test kits which they will be encouraged to use prior to attending work. If a staff member has a negative LFD test, they can continue to use public transport. However, if a staff member tests positive with a LFD test or develops symptoms, they must isolate immediately for 10 days in line with the [stay-at-home guidance and book a PCR test](#).