



Mass testing in schools: Your questions answered

The government has announced that teachers and students will have access to rapid testing as part of the Mass testing in schools programme. Here the government answers some key questions about this important step.

What does today's announcement mean?

Staff and students will have access to rapid testing from January to help as many students as possible to continue to be able to attend schools and colleges because that is what is best for their education and wellbeing.

All secondary schools and colleges, including special schools and alternative provision settings, will be offered test kits to facilitate weekly testing of the secondary school and college workforce.

This will be coupled with serial testing of close contacts for both staff and students in secondary schools and colleges. This will help preserve face-to-face education by preventing close contacts from needing to self-isolate at home.

So will you be routinely testing students as well?

Staff at secondary schools and colleges will be routinely tested. Both staff and students will offered daily tests if they have been identified as a close contact of a positive case so that they can stay in school or college, rather than isolate.



What about primary schools and early years settings?

We are prioritising secondary schools and colleges because they face greater disruption and because we want to ensure support for students and students in crucial exam years. The next step will be to roll out testing in primary schools. We are looking at how mass testing can best support the early years sector and we will work with local authorities and the sector to inform plans for mass testing in early years settings. We will announce more details as soon as we can.

Why are you doing this?

To ensure as many young people as possible continue to receive high quality, face to face education; and to break chains of transmission of the virus.

How will this actually help ensure face to face education?

This will help identify asymptomatic cases – which make up a third of all cases – limiting the spread of the virus.

Staff and students who are close contacts of cases will be eligible for daily testing, eliminating the need for immediate self-isolation. Only if a daily test returns a positive result will the staff member need to isolate. This means fewer staff members will need to isolate, ensuring they can continue teaching, and fewer students will need to isolate, enabling them to attend.



Who will be doing the testing in schools and colleges?

The Government is supporting all schools and colleges to set up appropriate spaces on site that can be used for testing. Schools and colleges are supplied with test kits and PPE and training will be provided. We will provide an advice line and guidance to support schools.

Are the tests compulsory? Will my child be forced to take a test if I don't want them to? What if teachers and staff don't want to be tested?

The tests aren't compulsory. However, staff and students who experience COVID-19 symptoms must continue to follow government guidance as normal, including immediate self-isolation and should book a test through nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119.

What will happen if my child's test result is positive or if a teacher tests positive?

They will need to self-isolate and follow the guidance from NHS Test and Trace. This means:

- They will need to self-isolate for 10 days from the date of the test
- You can stop self-isolating on day 11 if they haven't had a high temperature for 48 hours and are well
- People they live with must self-isolate for 10 days from when they start self-isolating

And what if it is negative?

Students will be able to carry on going to school and teachers will be able to carry on working.



What type of test will be used?

Lateral flow tests will be used in the first instance. These deliver a result in 30 minutes. If it is negative then students and teachers will be able to carry on as usual. If it's positive then they will have to isolate and get a second test that will be processed in a lab.

Does that mean the lateral flow tests aren't conclusive?

There is a low chance of false positive tests – that is why the secondary test is necessary. There is also a low chance that lateral flow tests don't pick up positive cases because they aren't as sensitive as lab-based tests. That is why there will be serial tests for close contacts of positive cases – they will be tested repeatedly over a number of days to ensure they are not positive.

Will the tests happen in schools?

Yes. Schools and colleges will need to arrange suitable spaces for the tests, storage for testing kits – they need to be kept between 2c and 30c – and for daily cleaning of the area. Further guidance will be provided.

You keep saying more guidance will be provided as soon as you can – why not just wait until all that is available?

We want to give schools and colleges as much time as possible to prepare for this although we appreciate that this is happening quickly. That is why we announcing this now and then providing more guidance as soon as we can.