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Guidance

Testing for COVID-19 before a hospital procedure

Updated 26 February 2021

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You must take your COVID swab test exactly 3 days before the day of your procedure.

Who can take the test

The test is suitable for the following people:

- adults aged 18 and over: self-test (unless unable to do so)
- teenagers aged 12 to 17: self-test with adult supervision
- children 11 and under: adult to test (see instructions on how to test a child (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/testing-for-coronavirus-at-home/covid-19-home-test-step-by-step-guide-adults-and-children#test-a-child>))

Checklist: what you need to do and by when

It's very important that you take the time to understand and complete the steps at the correct times.

1. Check the test kit contents

Do this as soon as you receive your test kit.

2. Register the test kit online

Do this as soon as you receive your order ID and test kit.

3. Book your courier collection

Do this 4 days before your upcoming procedure.

4 to 6. Prepare, take and package the swab sample

Do this 3 days before your upcoming procedure.

7. Give the completed test kit box to the courier

Do this 3 days before your upcoming procedure.

8. Get the test result by text

You should get a text by 12pm the day before your upcoming procedure.

Timetable: what you need to do and by when

Use the table below to note the day of your procedure and look down the table to find out which days you need to complete step 3 to 7.

Day of your procedure	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
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Day of your procedure	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
4 days before your procedure (step 3)	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed
3 days before your procedure (steps 4, 5, 6 and 7)	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur

1. Check the test kit contents

1. Wash your hands (with soap and warm water) for 20 seconds.
2. Clean and dry a surface and place the home test kit contents on it.
3. Check test kit contents.

If anything's broken or missing, immediately call your hospital where you're having your procedure.

Your test kit should contain:

- swab, inside sealed wrapper
- plastic tube, containing a small amount of liquid. The liquid must stay in the tube
- white absorbent pad
- zip-lock bag
- biohazard bag with silver seal
- return box, with pre-paid Royal Mail return label
- security seal, for the return box

2. Register the test kit online

It is very important you register your kit to ensure that you and your hospital receive your test result on time to avoid a potential cancellation of your procedure.

Register your hospital test online (<https://www.gov.uk/register-hospital-test>)

To register your test, you'll need:

- your 10-digit order ID (see your text message)
- your 11-character test kit barcode. Check the same barcode is on your plastic tube, biohazard bag and return box (example of test kit barcode reference: AAA12356789)
- the 13-character Royal Mail barcode on the prepaid return label. Enter numbers and letters only, and not the # hashtag symbol (example of Royal Mail barcode reference: ZD 1235 6789 1GB)

If you need help with registering your kit, call 119 and select option 1 for your upcoming hospital procedure.

3. Book your courier collection

You need to book your free, next-day courier collection 4 days before your procedure. The courier will arrive the following day, which is the day you take your test, 3 days before your procedure. To confirm which day this is, see the timetable or contact your hospital.

- book your courier (<https://www.collections.royalmail.com>) between 8am and 6pm
- your courier will arrive between 8am and 4pm on the day of collection
- take your test at least 1 hour before 8am on the day of collection to give yourself enough time before the courier arrives

If you need help with registering your kit, call 119 and select option 1 for your upcoming hospital procedure.

4. Prepare to take the swab sample

Take your test at least 1 hour before 8am on the day of collection (3 days before your procedure) to give yourself enough time before the courier arrives.

Prepare to do the test on yourself or someone else.

Taking the sample may feel a little uncomfortable and unusual. If possible, do a practice without using any of the testing materials.

If you're doing the test on a child or someone else, talk through the steps together. Remain calm and confident as you go through the process.

Watch a video showing how to take a swab test. The following video shows how to take a UK home test. Exact models may vary.

How to take a coronavirus self-test swab



Watch a video showing how to test a child.

How to test your child for coronavirus (Covid-19) i...



Tips for testing a child:

- do not do this test if you do not feel confident or if the child has any pain or asks to stop. If you cannot do the test, contact your hospital where the procedure is due to take place
- try to explain the test to the child in words they can understand
- some children may feel more comfortable sitting on a caregiver's lap

Get more advice about coronavirus in children (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/coronavirus-in-children/>)

5. Take the swab sample

- look inside the mouth and find the tonsils (or the area where they would be if you do not have them) at the back of the throat. This is where you'll take the swab sample. You can use a torch and a mirror to help you.

If testing someone else, ask them to say 'ahhhh' loudly for 5 seconds, so that you can see their tonsils

Tip for a child: If you cannot swab their tonsils, swab both of their nostrils for 10 to 15 seconds instead. The result may be less accurate.

- gently blow the nose and cough into a tissue so excess mucus does not spoil the test. Throw the tissue away in a closed bin
- wash your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds using soap and warm water before handling the test kit to avoid contaminating it
- open the package and gently take out the swab. You'll use this for both tonsils and nose

Try not to touch your tongue, teeth, cheeks, gums, or any other surfaces with the swab's fabric tip, as this may spoil your sample. If this does happen, complete and return the test anyway.

- holding the swab in your hand, open the mouth wide and gently rub the swab's fabric tip over both tonsils at the back of the throat for 10 seconds (use a torch and mirror to help you)

When the swab touches the tonsils, it may cause some gagging or brief discomfort, but it should not hurt.

- put the same end of the same swab gently into the nostril about 2.5cm (1 inch) or until you feel some resistance. Rotate the swab for 10 to 15 seconds and slowly remove it. If you or they have a piercing, use the other nostril

This may feel uncomfortable. Do not insert the swab any deeper if there's a feeling of strong resistance or pain.

- screw the lid off the plastic tube, while keeping it upright so the liquid stays inside. Put the swab into it with the fabric tip facing down. Snap off the stick end, so that the swab fits inside without bending

The liquid must stay in the tube. Securely screw the lid on so no liquid can leak.

6. Package the test kit

- wash your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds using soap and warm water
- place the absorbent pad into the zip-lock bag. Put the tube next to the absorbent pad in the same bag then seal the bag
- make sure the barcodes on the plastic tube and the biohazard bag match. Place the zip-lock bag into the biohazard bag and seal the bag using its silver seal
- follow the assembly instructions on the return box. If you can, wipe down the bag and box with an antiseptic wipe. Put the biohazard bag into the box, close the box and apply the security seal.
- take a picture or note of the barcode on your Royal Mail return label for reference

If you need help, call 119 and select option 1 for your upcoming hospital procedure.

7. Give the completed test kit box to the courier

Your courier will arrive between 8am and 4pm on the day of collection (3 days before your procedure). Please make sure you're ready with your completed test during this time.

Do NOT place the return box outside until the courier arrives.

Do NOT take the return box to the Post Office.

- the courier will knock on your door and then move at least 2 metres away
- after they move away, open your door, place the return box outside and then close the door

The courier will deliver your test kit box to a laboratory.

If your test kit is not collected by 4pm or you missed your courier, call 119 and select option for your upcoming hospital procedure.

8. Get the test result by text

- you will receive your result by text before 12pm the day before your procedure
- your hospital will also get the result by email

If you do not receive your result by then, please call the hospital where you're having the procedure.

What to do after getting your result

- if the result is negative, please continue to self-isolate and come to the hospital on the day of your procedure
- if your result is positive or unclear, call your hospital to discuss what to do next

If you've been harmed or had a reaction while using this kit

England and Wales

If you're in England or Wales, please report injuries and reactions (<https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk>).

Only use this website to report injuries and reactions.

Northern Ireland

If you're in Northern Ireland, please report injuries and reactions using these forms (<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/reporting-adverse-incident>).

You can also call 028 9052 3868 or email niaic@health-ni.gov.uk.

Scotland

If you are in Scotland, please send an email to nss.irc@nhs.net to request a webform account.

You can also call 0131 275 7575.

Get help if you're worried

Visit NHS 111 online (<https://www.111.nhs.uk>) or call 111 if:

- you, or someone you live with, gets worse over the next few days or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days
- you're worried about a baby or child who is ill

Call 999 in a medical emergency, if:

- you think there's something seriously wrong
- the baby or child seems very unwell or is getting worse

Do not delay getting help if you're worried. Trust your instincts.

Check if you have coronavirus symptoms and find out what to do next
(<https://www.111.nhs.uk/service/COVID-19>)

If you need help with your test kit

If you have any questions about your COVID-19 test kit, require help registering your test kit and booking a courier, please call 119 between 7am and 11pm and select option 1 for your upcoming hospital procedure.

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