

## FAQs – Surge COVID-19 testing in North Tyneside

### What is happening in North Tyneside?

Following a sharp rise in coronavirus cases and detection of the variant first identified in India, surge testing and the increased offer of vaccinations is underway in North Tyneside.

The number of cases in North Tyneside is rising and the Indian variant has been detected in different areas of the borough.

### Why are you introducing surge testing?

Surge testing and additional vaccinations are launching in North Tyneside to stop rising infection rates of COVID-19 in the borough and to understand where variants of concern are.

It is important to remember that this is a precaution and North Tyneside is not subject to extra or different restrictions and there is no current evidence that the variant first identified in India causes more serious illness and there is no evidence that vaccines are less effective against it. It does though appear to pass to others more easily.

### How is surge testing being carried out in North Tyneside?

Mobile Testing Units (MTUs) are open without an appointment from Saturday 22 May, 10am-4pm, in the following locations:

- Wallsend Forum, behind the Anson pub
- Bedford Street, North Shields town centre
- Shiremoor - next to Aldi and the Costa café

Residents and those who work or learn in North Tyneside are encouraged to make use of these PCR test sites if they **do not** have symptoms of COVID-19.

The guidance for anyone who does have symptoms of COVID-19 remains the same: stay at home, self-isolate and book a test online or by calling 119.

The existing test sites at The Parks Leisure Centre in North Shields and the Coronation Street car park in Wallsend should continue to only be used by those who **do have** symptoms.

This surge testing is in addition to lateral flow tests which the government encourage everyone to do twice a week.

### What about vaccinations?

It is important to remember that getting vaccinated is the best defence against COVID-19.

People over 50 and those with underlying health conditions who have had their first dose and not yet had their second will be contacted either by their GP practice or by the NHS National Booking Service with an offer to bring forward the date of their second dose.

Residents in this group should not contact their GP or the NHS and should wait to be contacted.

The rollout will remain in line with national eligibility to book a vaccine appointment.

People who are eligible but who have not yet had a first dose can book quickly and easily at one of 11 local community pharmacy locations in North Tyneside.

There are over 15,000 weekly appointments available in North Tyneside via the [NHS National Booking Service](#) or call 119 between 7am and 11pm.

### **Has the guidance changed in North Tyneside?**

Following national coverage of [recently revised Government guidance](#) it has been confirmed there are no restrictions on travel in or out of North Tyneside and there are no local lockdowns. The same [national restrictions](#) continue to apply here.

We are working to boost testing and vaccination and to support self-isolation. There are sensible public health precautions people can take as individuals in line with the sorts of advice we have all been following throughout the pandemic.

### **Who should get tested?**

Anyone who lives, works or learns in North Tyneside should get tested even if:

- you have no symptoms of COVID-19
- you have had a vaccination for COVID-19
- you have tested positive for coronavirus previously (but not within the last 90 days by a PCR test).

### **Who should not get tested?**

If you have tested positive by a PCR test within the last 90 days, you will not need to be tested unless you are already part of an existing programme of testing e.g. workplace.

If you tested positive using a lateral flow test (or rapid test), you are not excluded and should be tested.

### **Will I be informed if I test positive with a variant of concern?**

Yes. Where sequencing has taken place, cases with a variant of concern are informed of their test result either by the treating clinician or the PHE health protection team where this is part of an investigation.

### **I've already had the COVID-19 vaccine do I still need to have a COVID test?**

Yes.

If you've already had the COVID-19 vaccine we are still asking you to have a PCR test.

We know it can take a few weeks to build up immunity to the virus and this is an extra precaution to be on the safe side. It will also help us to understand if and how the virus has spread in the local community.

### **I'm an employer in one of the areas, should I keep my workforce home?**

In line with national restrictions, people should continue to work from home where they can and remember 'hands, face, space and fresh air'.

For testing to detect the variant of concern, Mobile Testing Units are being deployed for people without symptoms who are unable to work from home.

### **Will schools in surge testing areas close?**

The same national restrictions continue to apply in areas where new variants have been identified and there are no instructions for education settings to close.

### **What if I have been in one of the areas where surge testing is taking place recently?**

Everyone should continue to follow the national guidance and book a PCR test if they develop symptoms.

### **I am Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) and/or I can't get to the testing site, what do I do?**

You can order a free home PCR test kit on the [Government website](#).

If you have medical concerns or are unable to take a test, please call NHS 111.

### **Someone I know doesn't have access to the internet to book a test, how can they get tested?**

If you have no access to the internet you can telephone 119 to arrange testing.

### **I have received my at home testing kit, what do I do next?**

Watch [this video on how to take the test](#) or visit the [NHS website](#) for more information.

### **Do I need to self-isolate while I am waiting for my result?**

You do not need to self-isolate while you are waiting for your result if you continue to have no symptoms of COVID-19. If you are not showing symptoms, you can continue to go to work and don't need to isolate whilst you wait for your test result.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms after you have been tested for the variant, you must self-isolate and book a standard COVID-19 test through the NHS via the [NHS COVID-19 App](#), online or by calling [119](#).

### **How long until my test comes back?**

Test results showing whether you are positive or negative for COVID-19 will take up to 72 hours to be returned from collection date. Results will be shared via email or text message. Genomic sequencing (analysing the test sample for the variant first detected in South Africa, VOC 20 Dec 02) will be carried out after the initial test if it tests positive and will take longer.

If you do not receive COVID results from your test within 72 hours of it being collected, call [119](#) and quote the barcode number you recorded from the vial. You will not know the variant results at the same time, these will take longer.

If you don't have a mobile phone number or email address you will need to call 119 and inform them you are "non-digital" and need your results.

### **Can I go to work?**

You can continue to go to work within the current national lockdown rules, as long as you continue to have no symptoms of COVID-19

If your test result comes back positive for COVID-19, you must self-isolate for 10 days.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms after you have been tested for the variant, you must self-isolate and book a standard COVID-19 test through the NHS via the NHS COVID-19 App, online or by calling 119.

### **My result was positive for COVID-19, do I need to isolate?**

Yes, you must isolate if you have a positive result. Immediately self-isolate, inform your household and support bubble to self-isolate. You should also notify your employer.

Your isolation period includes the day your test was taken and the next 10 full days. You must complete all 10 days of the isolation even if you feel well, as you can still spread coronavirus to others. You may return to normal activities on day 11, please see the [NHS guidance for finishing self-isolation](#)

### **What are the advantages of PCR testing?**

PCR testing not only helps to identify someone who is positive, it helps monitor any new strains and identify any new patterns in virus behaviour.

## What does it mean when a virus changes or mutates?

All viruses can change over time and usually those changes are small and make little difference.

Sometimes the virus can change (mutate) in a way that allows it to spread more quickly or makes it resistant to interventions.

That's why we have experts constantly researching its behaviour, so that any changes can be identified and dealt with quickly.

## Should I still take the vaccine?

Yes. It is important that we all take the vaccine when offered.

Having the vaccine is an important way to stop the spread of COVID-19. Have your vaccine when offered.

Public Health England (PHE) and partners closely monitor the spread of variants in the UK, rapidly investigating variant mutations in the lab to determine their characteristics. They are continuing efforts to understand the effect of the variants on vaccine efficiency and there is currently no evidence to suggest that vaccines will be ineffective. If required, future vaccines could be redesigned and tweaked to be a better match to these variants, as is the case for seasonal flu vaccines.

PHE will keep looking at the data and intelligence to help with understanding the performance of vaccines in the real world, as well as in laboratories, but the trial data is very persuasive; these are highly effective vaccines, and we would expect that to translate into what happens in real practice.

## What other COVID-19 testing is available in North Tyneside?

- **Community testing in person and community collect at the Riverside Centre, North Shields:** You can take a test at the site by booking an appointment [here](#). Alternatively, you can pick up a box of tests to use at home from the centre. The centre is open seven days a week – you can find the opening times in the 'details' section [here](#).
- **Pharmacy collect:** Free tests can be picked up from pharmacies across North Tyneside. Over the coming weeks, more and more pharmacies will be signing up. NHS England's site finder allows you to search pharmacies near you that offer pharmacy collect, see [here](#).
- **NHS Test & Trace sites:** The Parks Leisure Centre, in North Shields, and Coronation Street, Wallsend, operate as testing sites for people with symptoms in the morning, but are currently providing an afternoon collect option, where you can pick up a box of rapid tests to use at home. You don't need to book to collect rapid tests, just turn up between 2.30pm and 8pm.
- **Education:** Staff in all schools and students in secondary schools and colleges are already being given tests to use at home twice a week, throughout term time and the holidays.

- **Postal kits - LFD Direct:** For people who can't access tests through the other routes, you can order a box of tests online or through 119, which will be delivered to your home. Order them [here](#).
- **Workplace testing:** Lots of employers across North Tyneside are offering testing, so if your employer offers workplace testing this is a great route for you to access rapid tests.

### **What else can we all do to help?**

There is still a lot that we can all do to stop the spread of the virus.

By following all of the public health measures: face covering, handwashing, social distancing and fresh air or good ventilation. By accessing testing, whether or not you have symptoms. By still going to health and vaccination appointments, unless self-isolating.

### **What support is available if I have to self-isolate?**

For those who need to self-isolate because they test positive or because they are a close contact, financial support is available from the council through the [Test and Trace support payment](#). Recipients must be financially impacted because they cannot work from home and will lose income as a result, or be in receipt of benefits.

In addition, our dedicated support hub continues to be available for those in need of immediate help and support and who can't call on family, friends, neighbours or carers.

Support will be tailored for individual needs, including welfare phone calls, help with accessing food shopping and medicine deliveries.

It's available for those who are self-isolating, either because they've been in close contact with someone with COVID-19 or have tested positive themselves.

Support also continues for those who are classed as clinically extremely vulnerable to the virus for the coming months, despite shielding coming to an end nationally on April 1.

The opening hours for the COVID-19 support hub are Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm, and is available via TEL: 0345 2000 101 or emailing [contact.us@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:contact.us@northtyneside.gov.uk)