

Communications support for Schools and Colleges

COVID-19 Variants of Concern Testing

Version distributed: 17 May 2021



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NHS
Test and Trace

COVID-19: VARIANT OF CONCERN IN YOUR AREA

**GET TESTED NOW
WHETHER YOU HAVE
SYMPTOMS OR NOT**

A variant of concern is present in **YOUR AREA**

Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 don't show symptoms and can spread the virus without knowing.

Play your part in helping to keep your community safer – get a test.

Use this space to add your URL and information on where to get a test

VERSION CONTROL

Version Control	
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Updated / new content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Letters targeted at parents / staff / pupils• Marketing section refresh
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1. Introduction

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

- The purpose of the pack is to support school and college leaders in their communications about a targeted case finding within their settings, following the initial notification of a Variant of Concern cases in their area.
- The pack provides school and college leaders with communication materials, including template letters to staff / parents, posters, leaflets, social media posts.
- The materials in this pack should be used in conjunction with any advice given by your Local Authority, who would provide you with further information about the additional public health measures deployed in the area to monitor and help suppress a Variant of Concern.

1.2 Covid-19 and Variants of Concern

- Viruses, like Covid-19, evolve over time.
- Sometimes a virus can change in a way that allows it to spread more quickly and it becomes known as a Variant of Concern. We can all help to stop the spread by:
 - Getting vaccinated
 - Remembering to wash hands, wear a face covering, make space and meet in the fresh air
 - Get PCR tested in surge areas or get tested twice a week in areas not affected by variants of concern
- We all need to continue to play a part in stopping the spread of the virus so that we can return to a more normal way of life and continue to ease lockdown restrictions.

1.3 VARIANTS OF CONCERN – THE NATIONAL RESPONSE

- We will continue to see variants of COVID-19 emerge as the virus evolves, and we should expect to live with them for some time.
- Variants of COVID-19 are classified as ‘of concern’, if there are signs that the variant could cause more harm, meaning that the variant could be more easily transmitted, or escape immunity from previous infection or vaccinations. It can take weeks of research to establish this in newly identified variants of concern, which is why immediate action is needed to contain the spread.
- In the UK, we widely monitor for variants of COVID-19 through **a process called** genomic sequencing and are world leaders in this work. We can only do genetic sequencing on PCR tests, which are different to the LFDs you do in the workplace. This genetic sequencing allows us to find new cases of the variants and helps us to stop the variants from spreading.
- In areas where variants of concern are identified, local action is taken **immediately** to limit the spread and contain the variant.

1.4 TARGETED CASE FINDING TESTING MODELS (1/2)

Following the initial notification of Variant of Concern cases in an area, health protection teams will immediately implement public health actions, including enhanced contact tracing and targeted testing of contacts if required. The affected Local Authority may adopt any combination of a number of measures to monitor and help suppress the variant. This will be agreed in consultation with Public Health England and the Department of Health and Social Care.

The surge testing interventions can include increases in symptomatic and asymptomatic testing through mobile testing units, home testing and **additional testing through specific settings including schools and colleges**.

Asymptomatic PCR surge testing at specific settings including schools and colleges will be deployed alongside the regular, rapid testing. All pupils and staff in surge testing areas should **continue to follow national guidance**, including 'hands, face, space, fresh air' and **take a rapid LFD Covid-19 test twice a week**.

VOC testing interventions	Description
Widescale surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A surge in asymptomatic and symptomatic testing across a whole local authority area or across a number of local authority areas.• Delivery models may include asymptomatic MTUs, additional home testing and asymptomatic testing via existing infrastructure (RTS/LTS)• Additional testing made available to specific settings (universities, schools, workplaces) in affected localities• All positives with a high enough viral load prioritised for sequencing• Enhanced contact tracing activated for area in scope.• Duration 3-4 weeks

1.4 TARGETED CASE FINDING TESTING MODELS (1/2)

VOC testing interventions	Description
Targeted community surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A surge in testing within a specific area, postcode or community.• Delivery models may include asymptomatic MTUs, additional home testing and asymptomatic testing via existing infrastructure (RTS/LTS)• All positives with a high enough viral load in targeted areas prioritised for sequencing• Target population around index case (5-10K)• Enhanced contact tracing activated for area in scope.• Duration 1-2 weeks
Targeted case finding within settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly targeted testing within a specific setting (e.g. workplace, school, business, street)• Delivery models may include an asymptomatic MTU or additional home testing• Any identified positive cases with a high enough viral load prioritised for sequencing• Duration < 1 week
Enhanced sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All positives with a high enough viral load in defined areas prioritised for sequencing
Enhanced contact tracing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specially trained contact tracers will contact all positive cases in VOC areas.
Wastewater monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genomic sequencing of viral genetic material found in wastewater samples within targeted areas.

2. Informing staff, parents and pupils

2.1 DRAFT LETTER / BULLETIN FOR STAFF (1/2)

Template letter for primary and secondary schools/ colleges in an area where Variant of Concern cases have been identified

Dear [Staff member],

Pick up your free PCR Covid-19 Tests at School / College

As you may know, [Local Authority name] will be carrying out additional Covid-19 testing after [insert variant], was found in our community. We have been asked to take part in additional testing, using a 'PCR test' which is processed in a laboratory. These tests allow Public Health England to see if there are any cases of the variant in our school / college.

There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness or that it makes vaccines less effective.

DELETE AS REQUIRED:

- [Variant first identified in India] The Government believes that this variant is more transmissible than the previous one – in other words it passes more easily from person to person.
- [Other Variants of Concern] Although the risk to the wider community is considered low, as a precaution, [Local Authority name], working in collaboration with Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace, is taking swift and decisive action to deploy additional surge testing in the targeted area.

2.1 DRAFT LETTER / BULLETIN FOR STAFF (2/2)



To help keep our friends, family and colleagues safe, we will be providing testing kits to **[all staff]** on **[insert date or dates]**. **Insert operational info about how testing will be conducted here.**

To receive your test result, you must register your test. After you have completed your test, go to <https://test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/register-kit> or call 119.

The test result will be then communicated directly **to you.**

If you test positive, have any symptoms, or are contact traced following contact with someone who tests positive, then you should self-isolate immediately in line with the guidance on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The more cases we find, the better chance we have at stopping it spreading. Please help to keep our school / college safer by **participating** in the testing.

The same national guidance continues to apply in areas where new variants have been identified and education settings can remain open. All pupils and staff should continue to follow national guidance, including **'hands, face, space, fresh air'** and take a rapid LFD Covid-19 test twice a week, even if you don't have symptoms.

For more information please visit **[PLEASE ADD YOUR LOCAL CALL TO ACTION, INCLUDING URL]**.

2.2 DRAFT LETTER FOR PARENTS / PUPILS (1/2)

Template letter for secondary schools / colleges in an area where Variant of Concern cases have been identified

Dear [Parent / Pupil],

Pick up your free PCR Covid-19 Tests at School / College

As you may know, [Local Authority name] will be carrying out additional Covid-19 testing after [insert variant], was found in our community. We have been asked to take part in additional testing, using a 'PCR test' which is processed in a laboratory. These tests allow Public Health England to see if there are any cases of the variant in our school / college.

There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness or that it makes vaccines less effective.

DELETE AS REQUIRED:

- [Variant first identified in India] The Government believes that this variant is more transmissible than the previous one – in other words it passes more easily from person to person.
- [Other Variants of Concern] Although the risk to the wider community is considered low, as a precaution, [Local Authority name], working in collaboration with Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace, is taking swift and decisive action to deploy additional surge testing in the targeted area.

2.2 DRAFT LETTER FOR PARENTS / PUPILS (2/2)

To help keep our friends, family and colleagues safe, **we will be providing testing kits to [all pupils and staff] on [insert date or dates].** **Insert operational info about how testing will be conducted here.**

To receive your test result, you must register **your / your child's** test. After you have completed your test, go to <https://test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/register-kit> or call 119.

The test results will be then communicated directly **to you as the parent or guardian of the child taking the test. [over 16 only?]**

If your child tests positive, has any symptoms, or are contact traced following contact with someone who tests positive, then you and your family should self-isolate immediately in line with the guidance on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The more cases we find, the better chance we have at stopping it spreading. Please help to keep our school / college safer by **participating** in the testing.

The same national guidance continues to apply in areas where new variants have been identified and education settings can remain open. All pupils and staff should continue to follow national guidance, including **'hands, face, space, fresh air'** and take a rapid LFD Covid-19 test twice a week, even if you don't have symptoms.

For more information please visit **[PLEASE ADD YOUR LOCAL CALL TO ACTION, INCLUDING URL].**

2.3 URLS TO ADD TO LETTERS AND BULLETINS

Please add the following links to letters and bulletins as appropriate

- Information on surge testing for variants of Covid-19 [Surge testing for new coronavirus \(COVID-19\) variants - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/surge-testing-for-new-coronavirus-variants)
- Information on self-isolation: [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-infection)

2.4 FAQ (1/2)

Question	Answer
What is a PCR test and how is it performed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is self-test. A sample is collected by inserting a long swab into the back of your throat and nose.
Why aren't you using community test sites/lateral flow "rapid" tests in surge areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genomic sequencing, which tells us whether a positive case is a variant or not, can only be conducted using a PCR test. We will also be deploying a new technology - known as 'genotype assay testing' – to rapidly detect new COVID mutations indicating whether positive test samples contain known variants. Genotype assay testing is compatible only with PCR tests.
Many of our staff, students and parents already use rapid LFDs to test regularly. Should they continue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes, absolutely. This continues to be a very important measure to help stop transmissions of Covid-19.
What does it mean if I get a positive test result?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A positive test means that you have COVID-19. Therefore, you will need to isolate and follow the stay at home guidance and follow the school protocols
What does it mean if I get a negative result?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A negative test result means that the virus that causes COVID-19 was not found in your sample. You can carry on as normal and do not need to isolate unless you develop symptoms.

2.4 FAQ (2/2)

Question	Answer
Who decides to offer surge testing in a school / college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Surge testing in a school / college will be offered if the school / college is in an area identified as having a case or cases of a Covid-19 Variant Of Concern (VOC). These areas are identified by Public Health England through their genomic sequencing of positive test results. The Local Authority Director of Public Health is responsible for deciding the exact operational response.
Will you be coming to schools/colleges to do surge testing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Packs will be sent to schools / colleges who are being asked to surge test, with clear instructions on what to do. Add more operational details here.
Our school/college is in a surge testing area. What should we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">You will be contacted [by your local authority] if your school / college is being asked to surge test.
Our school/college is close to a surge area. What should we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If your school / college is not inside the surge test area then you will not be asked to participate directly in surge testing. However, your pupils may live in the surge testing area and / or their parents / guardians may work in the surge testing area and you may therefore wish to mention it to your pupils, via your usual communications channels with them (assemblies etc). It's important to continue to follow government guidelines for your area and to keep implementing the other measures designed to stop the spread of Covid-19, including hand washing and social distancing – as well as encouraging staff and secondary school / college pupils to continue using rapid LFD tests twice a week.
Will schools in surge testing areas close?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">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. This situation is being closely monitored in case more restrictions are needed. Please check with your local authority for the latest advice.

3. Resources for schools and colleges

Surge testing resources

3.1 MARKETING ASSETS – GET TESTED

Surge testing for new variant assets (posters, flyers and social) have now been developed and are available here:
<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/>

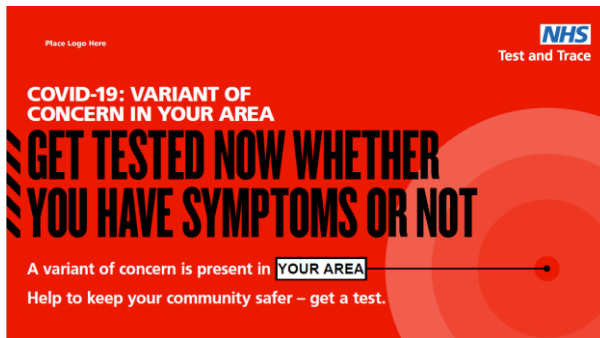
Posters (A3/A4), leaflets (A5), social assets available in two variations.

You will need to insert your own call to action with a URL and information on where to get a test:

GET TESTED:

“2021.05.11_Variant_Gettested_May_”
(published May 2021)

These assets are available as editable PDFs – all Local Authorities should be able to co-brand, insert a postcode and insert their localised call to action without the need for editing software.



Translations of v. April 2021 posters are available in:
Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi (India), Punjabi (Pakistan), Romanian, Slovak, Somali, Sylheti, Urdu, Welsh
<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/translations-variant-surge-testing/>

3.2 OPERATIONAL TOOLS AVAILABLE FOR SCHOOLS / COLLEGES

There are a number of operational assets available to help local authorities and schools / colleges implement surge testing:

- A set of **marketing assets advertising surge testing**, encouraging people to get tested and to register to get results (see final section of this pack for full details). These assets are available here: <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/>
- **Q&A** relating to surge testing in schools / colleges (part of the wider Q&A)
- Schools / colleges **tracker** detailing kits delivered and collection schedule. This will be shared by your Local Authority
- Schools / colleges **barcode register** to help reduce the number of samples that cannot be linked to a test subject. This will be shared by your Local Authority

School Surge Testing

Please create a separate list of barcodes for each class of students / set of staff members that are provided with kits

School Name	
Class Name & Year Group (for Staff members please just write 'Staff')	

PCR Barcodes (please record the barcodes of all PCR kits handed to students / to staff members)	

1	100598			80	Tue/Thr
2	100609			80	Tue/Thr
3	100556			40	Tue/Thr
4	131247			80	Tue/Thr
5	145614			40	Tue/Thr
6	100610			40	Tue/Thr
7	100560			80	Tue/Thr
8					

NHS
Test and Trace


**COVID-19:
VARIANT OF CONCERN IN YOUR AREA**

REGISTER YOUR
TEST TO GET
YOUR RESULT

By taking part you are helping us to keep track of the new variants of Covid-19. You must register your test to get your result.

You will need your test kit barcode.

To register your test go to:
www.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/register-kit
 Or scan the QR Code on the right with your mobile.
 Or call 119.



If you develop any Covid-19 symptoms then immediately self isolate and get a test at gov.uk/coronavirus, visit the **NHS COVID-19 app** or call 119.

Regular LFD testing resources

3.3 MARKETING ASSETS – PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Resources aimed at younger children which can be used in the classroom or shared with parents



Curriculum content and activities developed by 'Storicise' in partnership with CBBC's 'Operation Ouch'

[Link to be added](#)

A Factsheet developed in partnership with The Scouts
[COVID-19: the facts | Scouts](#)

A screenshot of the Scouts website's 'COVID-19: the facts' factsheet. The page has a teal header with the Scouts logo and navigation links: 'Join Scouts', 'Info for parents', 'Info for volunteers', 'About us', 'Shop', 'Sign in', and 'Donate'. The breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Coronavirus > Covid 19 the Facts'. The main content area is white with a teal background for the title and introductory text. The title is 'COVID-19: the facts' in bold. The introductory text says: 'Over the past year we've heard a lot about COVID-19. We've spoken to the experts to find out what exactly it is, how people catch it, and how we can stop it spreading.' Below this is a date: 'Last reviewed: 30 November 16:30'. The main heading is 'What is COVID-19?' followed by a paragraph: 'Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a new virus. It's a member of the coronavirus family. Coronaviruses cause respiratory infections, including the common cold. Previous new viruses in this family include MERS'. On the right side, there is a grey box titled 'Activities' with the text: 'Inform, empower and mobilise young people with these activities around the risks and realities of living in a pandemic, and what they can do to help others during this time.' A vertical 'Feedback' button is visible on the far right edge of the page.

3.4 MARKETING ASSETS – SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

All pupils and staff should continue to take a rapid LFD Covid-19 test twice a week

Downloadable resources including posters, banner, postcards

These assets are available as editable PDFs – all Local Authorities should be able to co-brand, insert a postcode and insert their localised call to action without the need for editing software.

HM Government NHS Test and Trace

Covid-19 testing for all students

Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms, so anyone using university facilities or back at their student home should get tested twice a week.

Help to protect your friends and those closest to you.

Rapid tests are easy and free with results in around 30 minutes.

Let's fight Covid-19 together.

FREE, RAPID COVID-19 TESTS

UNIVERSITY LOGO

TESTING AVAILABLE NOW

URL/PHONE NUMBER

HM Government NHS Test and Trace

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Let's fight Covid-19 together.

FREE, RAPID COVID-19 TESTS

UNIVERSITY LOGO

TESTING AVAILABLE NOW

URL/PHONE NUMBER

HM Government NHS

SAFER TRAVEL GUIDANCE

From 29 March, minimise travel where possible. If you need to travel:

- Plan your journey
- Regularly wash or sanitise your hands
- Wear a face covering, unless exempt
- Keep your distance from others where possible

HM Government NHS Test and Trace

Covid-19 testing for all students

Around 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms, so anyone using university facilities or back at their student home should get tested twice a week.

Help to protect your friends and those closest to you.

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FREE, RAPID COVID-19 TESTS

UNIVERSITY LOGO

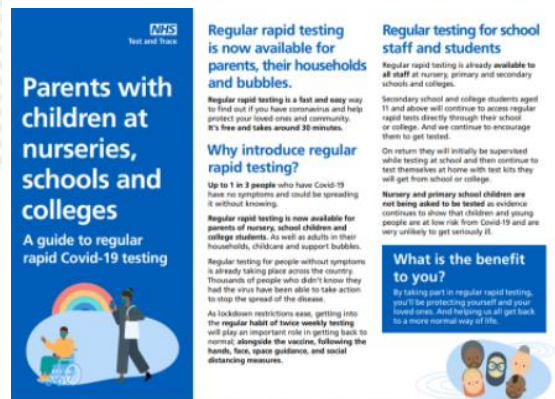
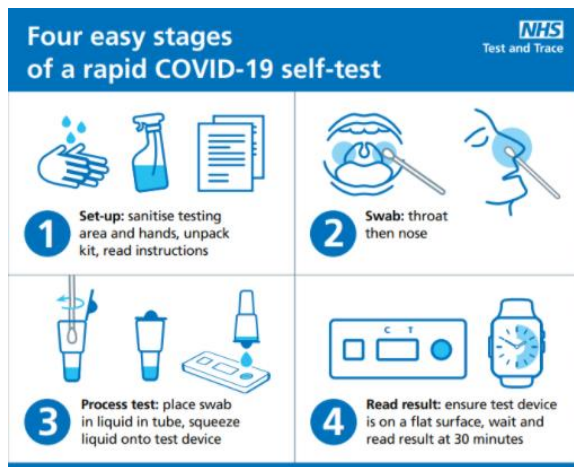
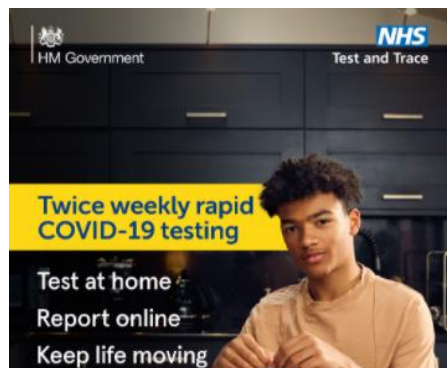
TESTING AVAILABLE NOW

URL/PHONE NUMBER

3.5 MARKETING ASSETS – SCHOOLS

Downloadable resources including posters, banner, postcards

In addition to the surge testing assets listed in the last section of this pack, more general testing assets are also available for schools here: <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/back-to-school/resources/>



Get in touch

For questions about anything in this guidebook or to discuss your communications plans please get in touch: masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk