

NHS Test and Trace reaches one million people over new year, as record numbers test positive

- A record one million people were reached by NHS Test and Trace contact tracers during the reporting week
- A record 683,124 contacts of people who tested positive were reached by NHS Test and Trace during the reporting week
- The Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme is extended until 31 March
- The number of mobile testing units will double to 500, with new and improved vehicles able to store twice the number of tests

More than one million people were contacted and told to self-isolate during the first week of 2021 – people who might otherwise have gone on to infect others. This means that 92.7% of contacts, and 86.6% of those who tested positive, were reached over the new year week. This is an increase of 48% (331,758 more) compared with the previous week.

As many more people are being reached and told to self-isolate, the government is extending the [Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme](#) until the end of March 2021. The scheme provides £500 payments to people who are told to self-isolate but are on a low income, cannot work from home and risk losing earnings, making it easier for people to adhere to self-isolation requirements.

People can also have confidence that if they have symptoms and need a test, they can get one. NHS Test and Trace's vastly expanded test site network now has more than 800 test sites in operation, including 432 local test sites. The median distance travelled for a test is just 2.4 miles, compared with 5.1 miles as recently as September.

To add to this, a fleet of 500 new and improved mobile testing units (MTUs) will be hitting the streets this week. MTUs were first introduced in April 2020 and they have carried out over 4.3 million tests to date. Over the past 9 months, MTUs have been the first at the scene at a significant number of outbreaks and critical moments, including testing hauliers in Dover and supporting the mass testing pilot in Liverpool.

The new vehicles offer twice the daily testing capacity of the original model, with the ability to store 1,000 test kits compared with the original's capacity of 500. This, combined with the doubling of the fleet's numbers overall from around 250 to 500, will significantly increase the testing capacity offered by the UK's mobile testing capability.

Alongside the existing symptomatic testing service, NHS Test and Trace has stood up a significant programme to pilot new testing technologies to proactively test individuals without symptoms and to improve the service's detection of positive cases.

This follows last week's announcement that the community testing offer is being expanded across all local authorities in England to test people without symptoms.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

NHS Test and Trace is delivering an essential and impressive service. It is truly extraordinary that a service that was only established last spring could now have contacted more than one million people in a single week, telling them to self-isolate and protect those around them. Although the rates of infection are continuing to rise, there can be no doubt that the rates would have increased by much more if NHS Test and Trace had not tested the 2.6 million people it provided tests to, or contacted such a large proportion of those who tested positive. I want to pay thanks to the efforts and dedication of everybody involved.

While our testing capacity continues to grow as part of the government's winter plan, NHS Test and Trace is also deploying hundreds of thousands of rapid tests to identify asymptomatic cases. Around 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 don't display symptoms, meaning you can infect others unknowingly. It is therefore crucial that we continue to follow public health guidance, and all play our part by following the rules and reducing our social contact to slow the spread of the virus.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

As cases rise across the country, so the demands on NHS Test and Trace increase. It gives me great pride to see our teams rising to meet that challenge. We are making tests available to anyone who needs one, and reaching a large proportion of those that test positive and their contacts – more than a million this reporting week. Everyone working in NHS Test and Trace and using the service can feel confident that what they are doing is contributing to saving lives and protecting the NHS.

We're not stopping there. We are continually seeking to make the system quicker and easier to use. A fleet of 500 new and improved mobile testing units will be deployed to areas of greatest need, adding to our already extensive network of test sites, while testing capacity in our labs continues to increase, with capacity now at more than 790,000 tests per day.

In total during the week of 31 December to 6 January, 1,019,253 people who had either tested positive or were a recent close contact of someone who had tested positive were reached and told to self-isolate.

Over the past months, the government has put in place the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. More than 58 million tests have been conducted in the UK so far and more than 6 million cases and contacts have been reached and told to self-isolate by contact tracers.

NHS Test and Trace now has the capacity to carry out more than 790,000 tests per day, compared with 2,000 just 9 months ago.

Launched on 28 September 2020, the Test and Trace Support Payment Scheme is administered by lower-tier and unitary authorities in England, with an initial £50 million of government funding for local authorities to cover the cost of administering the scheme.

To ensure people continue to have access to the support they need to stay at home, and reduce the transmission of COVID-19, the government is now providing an additional £20 million to local authorities to cover the cost of the scheme. This includes an additional £10 million to enable local authorities to continue making discretionary payments to people who fall outside the scope of the main scheme, but who will still face hardship if required to self-isolate.

Testing

As of 6 January, more than 58 million tests have been processed in the UK in total since testing began, more than any other comparable European country.

For this reporting period, turnaround times for test results have remained consistent with the previous week, with 62.9% of in-person test results returned the next day after the test was taken, compared with 63.0% the week before. 94.7% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours. This has remained broadly consistent since NHS Test and Trace began.

The NHS Test and Trace laboratory network processed samples as normal with the same level of capacity, including on bank holidays, to ensure continuity of service.

Tracing

Tracing performance has remained high with 86.6% of cases and 92.7% of contacts reached last week. The proportion of contacts reached within 24 hours as a proportion of those reached is 97.3%.

388,257 positive cases were transferred to contact tracers between 31 December and 6 January, 86.6% of whom were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 85.8% the previous week.

Between 31 December and 6 January, a record 736,939 people were identified as recent close contacts, with 95.9% of those with communication details provided reached and told to self-isolate. Since Test and Trace launched, 87.5% of close contacts for whom communication details were provided have been reached.

Background information

The [weekly statistics from the 32nd week of NHS Test and Trace](#) show in the most recent week of operations (31 December to 6 January):

- the proportion of contacts reached by tracing service remains consistent at 92.7%
- 86.6% of people who tested positive and were transferred to the contact-tracing system were reached and asked to provide information about their contacts, compared with 85.8% the previous week
- 95.9% of contacts where communication details were given were reached and told to self-isolate, compared with 96.0% the previous week
- 62.9% of in-person test results were received the next day after the test was taken, compared with 63.0% of tests the previous week (England only)
- 94.7% of pillar 1 test results were made available within 24 hours, compared with 93.6% the previous week
- 31.5% of in-person test results were received within 24 hours after the test was taken, compared with 33.0% the previous week
- 86.8% of satellite tests were received within 3 days, compared with 79.9% the previous week

[Guidance published to support business following deal with European Union](#)

Following agreement of a trade deal with the EU, the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) is helping ensure business understand what is expected of them, including on issues such as the use of the UKCA marking.

[It has produced a range of guidance and advice, all of which is available on GOV.UK.](#)

This now includes a '[What's Changed?](#)' summary guide to key changes regarding the specific product safety and metrology legislation amended by The Product Safety and Metrology etc. (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.

This guidance provides a clear indication of what rules and regulations you will be required to comply with now that the Transition Period has come to an end.

To be notified when new material is published on the OPSS pages of GOV.UK, [you can sign up for OPSS email alerts](#). Half way down, under 'Latest from OPSS', there is a 'get email alerts' button.

The process for placing goods on the UK market changed on 1 January 2021.

Northern Ireland will continue to align with all relevant EU rules relating to the placing on the market of manufactured goods.

[Find out about the **product safety** regulatory framework in Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 1 January 2021](#)

[Find out about the **metrology** regulatory framework in Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 1 January 2021](#)

General guidance is also available on placing goods on the UK and GB markets, conformity assessment marking, and trade between NI and GB markets.

[Find out about placing manufactured goods on the market in Great Britain from 1 January 2021.](#)

[Find out about placing manufactured goods on the market in Northern Ireland from 1 January 2021.](#)

You can see a [Summary Explainer of the Agreement with the EU](#), on GOV.UK.

[Home building stats show sector is bouncing back](#)

Press release

Support for all of those involved in the housing market and construction industry has led to an increase in the number of completed homes.



- Stats released today show the number of new homes developers have started building have more than doubled compared to the previous quarter
- Number of completed homes almost tripled compared to previous quarter
- Decisive government action to support the housing and construction industries to reopen safely leads to housing industry bouncing back

Support for all of those involved in the housing market, from renters and buyers to builders, and measures to help the construction industry to work safely during the pandemic, has led to an increase in the number of completed homes, new housebuilding figures published today (14 January 2021) show.

The [official statistics](#) show 35,710 homes were started in July to September 2020 – a 111% increase when compared to the previous quarter – while, 45,000 homes were completed in the same period, representing a 185% increase on the previous quarter.

Today's figures reflect the housing and construction industry's resilience and measures they have taken to keep building sites open, in line with public health advice.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Today's figures show that the number of new homes developers have started building have more than doubled compared to the previous quarter and the number of completed homes has almost tripled. This reflects the government's commitment throughout the pandemic to support industry to enable construction sites to remain open and operate safely.

We extended planning permission deadlines and flexible working hours on sites so that builders, architects and developers have been able to continue working, while following public health advice. In turn this has protected millions of jobs, from builders, through to estate agents and carpenters.

The housing industry is key to our economic recovery, which is why we're investing £12 billion in affordable housing, providing £400 million to build more homes on brownfield land, and investing £7.1 billion for a new National Home Building Fund over the next 4 years, unlocking up to 860,000 homes.

The [statistics](#) out today show 35,710 dwellings were started in July to September 2020. This is a 111% increase when compared to previous quarter.

45,000 dwellings were completed in July to September 2020. This is a 185% increase when compared to previous quarter.

Recent government support for home building includes:

- Setting out an overhaul of the country's outdated planning system to deliver the high-quality, sustainable homes communities need. The proposed changes will be a boost to SME builders who will be key players in getting the country building on the scale needed to drive our economic recovery, while leading housebuilding that is beautiful and builds on local heritage and character. Recent studies show smaller firms feel the complexities of the planning process and its associated risks, delays and costs are the key challenges they face in

homebuilding.

- We have set out an ambitious package of measures to ensure we build the right homes in the right places and level up opportunities across the country. This includes nearly £20 billion of investment in new housing as confirmed in the Spending Review, including over £12 billion of investment in affordable housing and our £7.1 billion National Home Building Fund.
- Our £400 million Brownfield Fund for 7 Mayoral Combined Authorities will deliver much-needed new homes on brownfield land – unlocking 26,000 high-quality homes.
- We have introduced a range of measures, such as allowing builders to seek more flexible construction site working hours with their local councils and extending certain planning permissions that would otherwise lapse, in order to keep the sector moving.
- We are also taking measures to support home buyers – for example we temporarily cut Stamp Duty Land Tax until the end of the financial year.

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[Environment Secretary's letter to the food and drink industry](#)

To those who continue to feed the nation,

In light of the ongoing challenges we face as a country with Covid-19, I want to pay tribute, once again, to all of you working within our food and drink supply chains as you continue to feed the nation under such difficult circumstances. The country is grateful for all that you have done and continue to do.

I know it has been a difficult 12 months, and many of you will have had a tough Christmas period, unable to see your family and friends. Some of you tragically may also have lost loved ones or colleagues. For this reason, and at a critical time for our country, it is more important than ever that we all continue to play our part to ensure those working in roles throughout the entire food and drink supply chain, from farm to fork, feel safe.

Whilst the vast majority of the public are protecting our NHS and other key workers by following the guidance on social distancing and face coverings, there are some who are not following the rules in the way that they should be, despite the risk posed by this virus. This is entirely unacceptable and I understand the concerns you will have about this. When you go into the workplace, you have the right to feel safe and I am committed to making sure that you do. Everyone has a role to play to help limit the spread of the virus and protect one another and the Government will continue to make this

clear to the public.

Food businesses have gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure workplaces are as Covid secure and as safe as possible, from managing capacity in shops, to encouraging customers to comply with regulations and guidance to keep us all safe. In the last few days, supermarkets have stepped up again, building on previous work, to further tighten their measures.

I am enormously proud of the work that you have done, and I want to thank each and every one of you. You have been, and continue to be, the hidden heroes of this pandemic.

George Eustice

OSCE Chairperson in Office, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, H.E. Ms. Ann Linde: UK response

I would like to warmly welcome Her Excellency Ms. Ann Linde to the Permanent Council and to her new position as OSCE Chairperson in Office. The UK looks forward to working with you and your excellent team here in Vienna and in Stockholm over the course of 2021. I would also like to welcome the new Secretary General and the new heads of the autonomous institutions.

Sweden is assuming this important leadership position at a critical time for Euro-Atlantic security. An ongoing pandemic, significant challenges to human rights and fundamental freedoms, and protracted conflicts form the backdrop to our security landscape. The UK is a firm supporter of the international system – with mounting challenges, we believe steadfastly in multilateralism and the importance of international organisations such as the OSCE. We agree that it is in our collective interest to work together in tackling common challenges. We need to ensure the multilateral system emerges from 2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic stronger. We thank Sweden for taking on this important role at this crucial time.

Your priorities as set out for the OSCE chime with the UK's – focus on defending the European security order, addressing protracted conflicts and enhancing democracy and gender equality. We agree on the importance of supporting the work of the OSCE's autonomous institutions, with their strong mandates and unique strengths, and that involving civil society organisations in our work helps us live up to our OSCE commitments.

And the beating heart of the OSCE is the collection of commitments and values all 57 participating States have freely signed up to, starting from the Helsinki Final Accord in 1975. Non use of force, sovereignty, territorial

integrity and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms – these are at the core of these commitment, and are ultimately what this organisation is all about. We need to work together to uphold them. In this regard, the UK will be a firm supporter throughout your Chairpersonship in defending the values and rules that keep us safe.

On human rights, fundamental freedoms and the priority of enhancing democracy – the UK will continue to work to promote those rights and uphold these principles and commitments in the OSCE area. There are a number of places where they are currently denied and where there is significant backsliding. This year is a vital one to remind ourselves of our OSCE human dimension commitments. These include the holding of democratic elections which are periodic, genuine, free and fair. They include upholding the rule of law with independent judiciaries ruling on transparent laws where everyone is treated equally. And also include the full implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms such as the freedom from torture, the right to a fair trial, and the freedom of expression, where media freedom and the safety of journalists are crucial. We need to remind ourselves that the hard-won gains of past decades can never be taken for granted, anywhere. We look forward to working with you, and the new heads of the autonomous institutions, on upholding these vital commitments.

We share your conviction that we must prioritise conflict resolution and agree with your assessment that the OSCE has many tools at its disposal to support these efforts.

The Trilateral Contact Group, skillfully chaired by Ambassador Grau, and the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission, under the dedicated leadership of Ambassador Cevik, have been vital and we continue to offer them our steadfast support in addressing the impacts of the conflict in and around Ukraine. Let us be clear – this is a conflict that Russia started and continues to fuel as part of their ongoing aggression against Ukraine, which remains one of the most serious security threats to the OSCE region. We will not stop calling on Russia to end its illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilising activities in eastern Ukraine and return to the respect for OSCE principles and commitments.

Sadly, last year provided many sombre examples of how conflicts in the OSCE region continue to blight the lives of civilians. We were deeply saddened by the tragic loss of life during the escalation of military hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and gravely concerned at the continuing human rights violations and unacceptable restrictions on freedom of movement in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova. All these situations make clear the urgent need to ensure respect for OSCE principles and commitments, as well as to further intensify the OSCE's vital conflict resolution work. As Sweden takes on this important task, you can rely on our firm support both for you and for all the OSCE's conflict resolution formats.

As Chair of the Security Committee in 2020, I was pleased that consensus was reached on a declaration underlining the importance of implementing OSCE commitments to tackle transnational organised crime. I and the UK stand ready

to continue supporting your efforts to build on this priority topic in 2021, as well as on wider priorities such as cyber security.

We welcome your focus on comprehensive security. As host of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties next November, we recognise the importance of addressing the growing threat of long-term security challenges like climate change.

Your focus on gender equality and its importance is shared by the UK. We should be of no doubt that security – whether we are talking regional security, political security, economic security, environmental security, or human security – is enhanced by gender equality. Last year, 52 out of 57 participating States agreed to fully implement UNSCR 1325 in the OSCE area. This demonstrates the importance attached to the WPS agenda. We must do more to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, including in conflict and crisis situations. Initiatives such as the Protection Framework for women peacebuilders can help support this. And we look forward to working with you to advance this agenda.

Your Excellency – in concluding, we wish you and your team the very best in the important year ahead in the OSCE. Please be assured of the UK's support.