

Military to support the testing of thousands of secondary school and college students in England

The personnel are on standby to support secondary schools and colleges across England to roll out COVID-19 testing to students and staff as the new term begins in January.

The armed forces deployment across England builds on successful school testing pilots conducted in November and December. Personnel supported thousands of tests being carried out at pilot schools, demonstrating the value of lateral flow devices rapidly testing students in a school environment.

1,500 UK Armed Forces personnel are being made available to support the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care to ensure that students and staff can return as safely as possible to secondary schools and colleges across England.

The majority of personnel will form local response teams, providing support and phone advice to institutions needing guidance on the testing process and set-up of the testing facilities.

This will be done predominantly through webinars and individual meetings, but teams will also be on standby to deploy at short notice to provide in-person support to resolve any issues in the situations where testing would otherwise not be able to go ahead. Schools and colleges will shortly be provided with further information on how to request additional support if needed.

A small team of planners is embedded in the Department for Health and Social care who are supporting the Department for Education to help coordinate the support. The majority of personnel will be on task from this week as they start to conduct training.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

The UK Armed Forces are stepping up once again this holiday. This week I have authorised over a thousand Armed Forces personnel to assist schools returning after the Christmas break.

They'll share considerable experience of testing across the country and the successful school pilots conducted this autumn.

We are grateful for the professionalism and commitment they and our

colleagues in teaching are showing to get students back into the classroom and on with their education.

Every secondary school and college in England is being offered testing, with £78 million funding for schools and colleges to support this offer.

As well as additional funding, the government will provide schools and colleges with the kit they need and have introduced a staggered return at the start of term.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

It is a true cross-government effort to make sure secondary schools and colleges have the support, guidance, materials and funding they need to offer rapid testing to their staff and students from the start of term.

I am grateful to the armed forces personnel, and all the school and college staff, leaders and volunteers working to put testing in place. This will help break chains of transmission, fight the virus, and help deliver the national priority of keeping education open for all.

Students will be expected to swab themselves in the vast majority of cases, under the supervision of a school staff member or volunteer who has been trained for the role. Teachers are not expected to take a role in the testing process.

This support is being provided through the Military Aid to Civil Authorities (MACA) process. There are currently around 2914 personnel committed to 55 tasks to support other government departments and civil authorities with the response to coronavirus. This includes support with community testing across the UK, the provision of ambulance drivers in Wales and testing support for hauliers in Kent.

Jenrick calls for community togetherness to combat loneliness

The government has announced a £7.5 million funding package to help tackle loneliness over the winter period, supporting sectors that are well known for bringing people and communities together such as the arts, libraries, charities and radio.

With millions of people now under the new Tier 4 COVID-19 restrictions due to the spread of a new variant, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick has thanked those who are continuing to spread festive cheer and tackling loneliness, while urging us all to look out for our neighbours.

Two schemes have been highlighted as going that extra mile:

- Poole Housing Partnership which established a call service for older and vulnerable residents to enjoy regular chats with friendly volunteers.
- Your Homes Newcastle was also praised for delivering homemade Christmas meals to their older residents to spread the festive cheer.

These are just two examples of vital work by housing associations to tackle the social effects of COVID-19 across England since the government launched its 'Charter for Social Housing Residents' last month.

These landmark reforms will improve the lives of residents by giving them a much greater voice and more power to hold landlords to account, and help them to establish strong networks to combat social isolation and loneliness.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

None of us have never known a Christmas like this. While we may have had smaller and quieter Christmases than normal, for some people this Christmas will have been especially hard – and very lonely. That's why I'm encouraging people to find other ways to reach out virtually and help combat loneliness – by picking up the phone or writing a letter, for example.

Let's all do what we can to connect with our older neighbours – in a Covid-secure way – so they feel less alone and know how valuable they are to their communities at this difficult time.

The charity Age UK estimates that there are approximately 1.4 million chronically lonely older people in England.

The government has been working to tackle loneliness during the pandemic. Over £24 million of the £750 million charity funding package has gone directly towards reducing loneliness, and a further £45 million to organisations supporting people with their mental health.

In June the government relaunched its long-running campaign, Let's Talk Loneliness. If you're lonely or looking to help others, there is lots of helpful advice and support on the [Let's Talk Loneliness website](#).

The government has also announced it will launch a new campaign to highlight the Charter for Social Housing Residents in February 2021. The campaign will highlight what the changes will mean for residents and how they can access support.

Poole Housing Partnership

Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) has been working to support their residents through the pandemic.

They put in place a call service in which vulnerable residents received regular phone calls to check in on their wellbeing and signpost them to supporting agencies such as the council volunteer service or onto the NHS.

One resident named Chris asked whether they could call other people rather than just receiving a call from PHP. Other residents agreed it was a great idea and that it would hopefully lead to new friendships. PHP now has 25 befrienders who each call between 5 to 10 people a week, and the numbers keep growing.

PHP has a long-standing relationship with Fareshare which operates out of 13 PHP hubs across Poole. Run by residents for residents, Fareshare ran a café service that had to close last March due to social distancing requirements.

With support from PHP to source equipment, the Fareshare service transformed itself into a food delivery service and has been creating food parcels and meals for over 150 households each week. PHP residents cook the food and PHP staff and other residents deliver it to those who normally attended the café service or to those we had been identified on the calls as in need.

This has gone some way to tackling loneliness with residents increasingly involved in leading or supporting the food services.

Your Homes Newcastle

Food Nation, a food charity based in Newcastle, applied to YHN's Community Investment Fund to deliver group cooking sessions to help bring people together who were socially isolated so they could spend time in company and develop new skills.

The pandemic meant that couldn't go ahead in person, so their volunteers are cooking meals themselves and delivering them along with a socially distanced chat.

Additionally, one of YHN's Board member's children and their classmates wanted to write cards for older people who might not receive one otherwise. The Board member contacted YHN's housing manager, Helen, and her staff identified double the number of people to the cards available.

Helen contacted her daughter's school, and her class made cards for the remaining half. YHN staff are going to support the older people to write thank you letters to the children, as they don't often have people to write to either.

£200k of fraudulent invoices lands director with ban

Christopher Carr (28), of Manchester, was the director of Carr's BK Ltd. The company was incorporated in July 2017 but was wound up in court in November 2019 and the Official Receiver was appointed as liquidator.

The Official Receiver investigated Christopher Carr's conduct as director of the company before uncovering he had created bogus documents in order to illicitly claim tax rebates.

Enquiries established that in November 2017 Christopher Carr submitted a tax return for more than £72,000 claiming on goods he had not purchased.

A second return was submitted in January 2018 for more than £117,000. Both returns were paid by the tax authorities.

But the invoices and bank statements used to support the two claims were false. The supplier referred to in the claim told the tax authorities that although Christopher Carr was a customer, the invoice submitted was not genuine.

Christopher Carr admitted he had falsified documents to claim the funds in April 2018. He was issued with a penalty of more than £110,000, including interest.

The Secretary of State accepted a disqualification undertaking from Christopher Carr after he did not dispute that he fraudulently created false invoices, to obtain tax repayments totalling just over £190,000.

The disqualification became effective on 14 December 2020 and Christopher Carr is banned from directly or indirectly becoming involved, without the permission of the court, in the promotion, formation or management of a company for 11 years.

Dave Elliott, Chief Investigator at the Insolvency Service, said:

Christopher Carr created false invoices and bank statements knowing his aim was to defraud the tax authorities out of hundreds of thousands of pounds.

We worked closely with the tax authorities to bring Christopher Carr's actions to light and this 11-year disqualification recognises the seriousness of his actions.

Christopher Carr is of Manchester and his date of birth is December 1992.

CARR'S BK LTD. Company number 10865433

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings. Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a [range of restrictions](#).

[Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct.](#)

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[Statement on the trial of the Shenzhen 12](#)

News story

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has expressed his deep concern at arrest of the Shenzhen 12 in China.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

We are deeply concerned that members of the Shenzhen 12 were tried in secret today, having been given just three days' notice of their trial. Diplomats from Britain and a number of other countries, tried to attend the court proceedings but were denied entry.

The Shenzhen 12 have not had access to lawyers of their choosing, raising further serious questions about access to legal counsel in Mainland China. We expect China to uphold the rule of law and conduct trials in a fair and transparent manner, consistent with the basic requirements of international human rights law.

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Promotions of unhealthy foods restricted from April 2022

- Offers for unhealthy foods like 'buy one get one free' and promotions in prominent locations in stores and online to be restricted from April 2022
- Free refills of sugary soft drinks will also be prohibited in the eating-out sector
- Restrictions will apply to medium and large stores

The new rules, designed to support the nation to make healthier choices, will prohibit retailers from offering multibuy promotions such as 'buy one get one free' or '3 for 2' offers on these products.

Unhealthy promotions will also no longer be featured in key locations, such as at checkouts, store entrances, aisle ends and their online equivalents.

Promotions often appear to help shoppers save money. However, data shows that these deals actually increase purchases of promoted products by almost 20%. They encourage people to buy more than they need or intended to buy in the first place.

Free refills of sugary soft drinks will also be prohibited in the eating-out sector.

Public Health Minister Jo Churchill said:

We know families want to be presented with healthier choices. This is why we are restricting promotions and introducing a range of measures to make sure the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Creating an environment which helps everyone eat healthier foods more regularly is crucial to improving the health of the nation.

In the New Year, PHE's Better Health Campaign will also run new adverts on TV and online to inspire and support people to maintain a healthy weight.

Obesity is one of the biggest health crises the country faces. Almost two thirds (63%) of adults in England are overweight or living with obesity and 1 in 3 children leave primary school overweight or obese. Obesity-related illnesses cost the NHS £6 billion a year.

These changes will make supermarkets and other retailers places where the healthy choice is the easy choice for everyone and support people to lead healthier lives.

The location of products within stores can lead to 'pester power' from children and can also significantly affect people's purchases. For example, end-of-aisle displays have been shown to increase soft drink sales by over 50%.

Today's announcement forms a key part of the government's strategy to tackle obesity and get the nation fit and healthy. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the impact that obesity can have on people's health and health outcomes.

These measures will support people in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight and overall will improve the nation's health.

An [8-week technical consultation](#) has launched today on GOV.UK to seek views from industry stakeholders and enforcement bodies on how these policies can be implemented.

The restrictions on promotions are:

- location restrictions at store entrances, aisle ends and checkouts and their online equivalents (homepages, landing pages for other food categories, and shopping basket or payment pages)
- volume price restrictions will prohibit retailers from offering promotions such as 'buy one get one free' or '3 for 2' offers on HFSS products
- free refills of sugary soft drinks will be prohibited in the eating-out sector
- the location restrictions will only apply to stores over 2,000 square feet – specialist retailers, such as chocolate shops, are exempt from the location restrictions
- prepacked food and drink in the following categories will be restricted if they are considered HFSS: soft drinks, cakes, chocolate confectionery, sugar confectionery, ice cream, morning goods (for example, pastries), puddings, sweet biscuits, breakfast cereals, yogurts, milk-based drinks with added sugar, juice-based drinks with added sugar, pizza, ready meals, meal centres, including breaded and battered products, crisps and savoury snacks, chips and similar potato products

The 2004 to 2005 Nutrient Profiling Model will be used to define whether a product is HFSS.

The policy focuses on the products that are significant contributors to sugar and calorie intakes in children and that are heavily promoted.

Only those products that are HFSS will be restricted, so there is scope for businesses to promote healthier products within these categories.