

New reagent available to support global diagnostic testing of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The reagent is intended to be used in tests that confirm whether an individual is currently infected with the virus.

The reagent can be used as a positive control for the testing systems used to detect the presence of COVID-19. A positive control is included in tests by means of a sample that contains a known amount of the coronavirus genetic material. This acts as a confirmatory sample that assures the test is working correctly.

The reagent is non-infectious genetic material from SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic. An initial batch of 1,500 vials is available from the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control (NIBSC) with production of a further batch currently underway.

An expert centre of the MHRA, NIBSC has fast-tracked the development and production of this reagent. It is to be made freely available globally and will help more laboratories to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Nicola Rose, Head of the Division of Virology at the NIBSC, said:

Accurate diagnostic tests are a vital component in the fight against COVID-19.

This reagent is a great example of the NIBSC rapidly responding to public health needs in the response to COVID-19. The development of the research material is a prelude to the production of established standards and reference materials that laboratories can use in their own work on COVID-19, and we will continue to make producing this material an absolute priority.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

We have built the largest diagnostic testing industry in British history from scratch in a matter of weeks.

Thanks to our world-leading scientists and clinicians, we've now been able to fast-track a new biological reagent to help the UK and countries across the globe carry out even more tests and develop ever more accurate ways of diagnosing the virus.

“It’s yet another example of the UK’s pioneering life sciences sector leading the way in the fight against coronavirus.

The rapid availability of biological materials is a key component in global response efforts to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak. The availability of the reagent also supports the Government’s new national testing strategy, which involves testing in NHS and PHE laboratories, as well as in a completely new network of labs, mobile testing units and home testing kits across the UK, to boost testing capacity.

Additional [SARS-CoV-2-related research materials](#) are also available from the NIBSC.

[A message of thanks from Peter Schofield](#)

News story

A personal message from Peter Schofield, Head of the Operational Delivery Profession (ODP).



As you’re aware, the UK is facing some of the most difficult times in recent history. Now, perhaps more than ever before, our citizens are becoming reliant on the vital public services that you deliver every day.

That we have come together as a community to meet these challenges head on makes me immensely proud of the Operational Delivery Profession. Despite significant changes to our working environment and practices you continue to uphold our commitment to support, assist and protect every customer that depends on us.

That’s why I wanted to make absolutely clear my appreciation of the work you do. In a period that is unsettling for all of us, you continue to provide

reassurance by being there for the people that need us; often some of the most vulnerable people in society. Your work is recognised and thoroughly appreciated.

So I'd like to send you my personal and heartfelt thanks. It is clear to me from the responses I see every day from members of the profession that by working together, and by being there for each other, we can overcome the challenges we face.

Thank you again for making me so proud to be your Head of Profession.

Peter Schofield Operational Delivery Head of Profession; and Permanent Secretary of Department for Work and Pensions.

Published 6 May 2020

[Over 69,000 loans approved in the first day of the Bounce Back Loan Scheme](#)

News story

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The seven largest lenders (Barclays, Danske, HSBC, Lloyds, RBS, Santander and Virgin Money) received more than 130,000 Bounce Back Loan Scheme applications on the first day of the scheme (4 May). Over 69,000 of these have been approved on the first day, and lenders are working hard to process and approve the rest as quickly as possible.

Bounce Back Loans are helping thousands of small firms get finance quickly at a low, affordable rate and with a 100% government-backed guarantee.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, said:

Small businesses will be the driving force of our recovery from the pandemic, creating jobs and securing economic growth.

These loans will help them bounce back from this crisis – getting money fast – so it's great to see more than 69,000 businesses benefitting in just the first day.

It's vital this speedy progress continues in the days and weeks ahead.

The Bounce Back Loan scheme is one part of the government's package of business support that includes: £8 billion to pay the wages of furloughed staff at 800,000 firms, nearly 700,000 business properties benefiting from £8.6 billion of business grants, generous VAT deferrals and scrapping businesses rates.

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Business rates revaluation postponed

A revaluation of business rates will no longer take place in 2021 to help reduce uncertainty for firms affected by the impacts of coronavirus, Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP has announced.

Legislation had been introduced to bring the next revaluation forward by one year from 2022 to 2021, but following the recent economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic ministers want to ensure businesses have more certainty during this difficult time.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

We have listened to businesses and their concerns about the timing of the 2021 business rates revaluation and have acted to end that uncertainty by postponing the change.

Now is the time for us to continue to focus on supporting businesses affected by the pandemic, including through our unprecedented package of almost £10 billion in business rates relief.

The government is continuing work on the fundamental review of business rates, with the key aims of reducing the overall burden on businesses, improving the current business rates system, and considering more fundamental changes in the medium-to-long term. The call for evidence for the review will be published in the coming months.

The postponement comes on top of the government's support package for business and workers during the economic emergency including:

- businesses are set to receive a [discount of almost £10 billion](#) on their rates bills this financial year in response to coronavirus, after the business rates retail discount was increased to 100% from 50% for 2020 to 2021
- over £12 billion for local authorities to deliver grants of up to £25,000 to eligible businesses. As of 3 May, over £8.6 billion has been paid out to over 697,000 business properties
- [protections for UK high street shops and other companies](#) under strain will be protected from aggressive rent collection and asked to pay what they can during the coronavirus pandemic
- the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) where small and large employers will be eligible to apply for a government grant of 80% of workers' salaries up to £2,500 a month, backdated to March 1 and available for at least 3 months. The first grants have been paid.
- a deferral of the next quarter of VAT payments for firms, until the end of June – representing a £30 billion injection into the economy
- a total of £330 billion worth of government backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses

The Non-Domestic Ratings (List) Bill 2019-20 was introduced to bring the date of the next revaluation forward from 2022 to 2021.

The government remains committed to frequent revaluations to ensure that business rates receive bills that more accurately reflect up-to-date property rental values.

A revaluation is the review of the rateable values of all business and other non-domestic property in England at a particular point in time.

Revaluations are done to maintain fairness in the system by redistributing the total amount payable in business rates, reflecting changes in the property market.

A property's business rates bill is based on a precise estimate of the premises' rental value. Business rate bills are calculated using specific valuation methods. It is important for rateable values to be regularly updated through revaluations to ensure bills stay accurate. With changing circumstances as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the next revaluation will not go ahead in 2021.

Celebrating 70 years of partnership with a cool contest!

World news story

To mark the platinum wedding we are happy to announce a contest on our Instagram channel. Full terms and conditions below.



This week, Britain and Israel celebrate 70 years since the establishment of their diplomatic relations. To mark the occasion together with our wonderful embassy followers, we are holding a competition: We want you to send us an original image (painting, photo, collage, etc. – be creative) that symbolizes this relationship. Let your imagination go wild because we have cool prizes. Competition ends on Friday 22 May at 12 Israel time.

Prizes

- First Prize – Fuji Instax Mini instant development camera AND change our cover photo to the winning image
- Second prize – JBL portable speaker

Participation:

Share a photo to Instagram, tag the embassy account [@UKINISRAEL](#), AND email it at ukinisrael@gmail.com. The photos will be uploaded to a special album on our Facebook page.

British Ambassador to Israel Neil Wigan will choose the Winning Picture!

Please note the terms and conditions:

Please tag just one photo from each Instagram account and email address. Family who would like to send photos of several family members (more than one photo) are invited to indicate this in the body of the email. Abusive content will be deleted and the advertiser removed from the page.

General Terms:

- Images submitted will be original images only and a participant in the competition is prohibited from making use of any image protected by intellectual property rights. The embassy disclaims any responsibility for infringement of intellectual property rights of any kind and a participant breaching such rights shall indemnify the embassy for any damage caused to the embassy as a result of such breach
- Without derogating from the generality of the foregoing, the embassy reserves the right to use any available means to identify the originality of the images, for the purpose of preventing counterfeiting or intellectual property rights infringement. The embassy's determination, at its sole discretion, as to the originality of the images, shall be final and irrefutable and shall be binding for every purpose and intent
- The embassy is not and shall not be liable for anything related to the prizes and/or their use and/or their quality and/or related or associated services and/or to any damage resulting from use thereof. The responsibility of the embassy is limited solely to conducting the competition and awarding the prizes as set forth in this document
- Responsibility for participating in the competition shall be solely with the participants. The embassy shall not be liable for any damage caused to any of the participants and/or any other third parties in connection with the participation in the competition
- The embassy may publish the names of the winners and the prizes they have won, by means of advertisements and/or in newspapers and/or social media platforms. Each participant in the competition confirms that by participating in the competition, he/she agrees to the disclosure, by any means mentioned above, of his/her name, winning and prize
- The winner will be notified by email and/or DM on Instagram/Facebook within 28 days of the closing date. If the winner cannot be contacted or do not claim the prize within 14 days of notification, we reserve the right to withdraw the prize from the winner and pick a replacement winner
- Prizes are not and cannot be converted into money and/or converted into any other benefit and/or paid in kind. Embassy employees and their family members are prohibited from participating in the competition. Any tax and/or levy and/or fee imposed, if imposed, on the award of the prizes to the winners shall be borne by the winners.

The embassy may, at its sole discretion, amend this document and/or extend the competition period.

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