Coronavirus testing in Hertfordshire: 'Test and Trace' and antibody testing explained

The national NHS 'Test and Trace' programme is fully operational across Hertfordshire.

What does this mean for you?

If you have suspected COVID-19 symptoms and then have a swab test which shows that you do have coronavirus, you will be contacted by someone from the NHS Test and Trace team. You will be told that you must self-isolate for seven days from the day that your symptoms first started. You will also be asked to supply the details of anyone you have been in close contact with, from the two days before your symptoms started. Those people will be contacted by the NHS Test and Trace team and told that they need to self-isolate for 14 days. Anyone else in your household must self-isolate for 14 days from when you started having symptoms.

It is very important for your own health and the health of those around you that you self-isolate. This applies even if you feel well and don't have any symptoms. You could still be a carrier of the virus and the people you meet could get the virus from you and be seriously affected.

If you test positive for COVID-19 but haven't had any symptoms (some people without symptoms are being tested because they work with vulnerable people), you must also self-isolate and follow the instructions from the Test and Trace team.

Stopping COVID-19 from spreading is crucial to prevent more lives from being lost.

Don't fall victim to fraud

Genuine contract tracers will:

- call you from 0300 013 5000
- send you text messages from 'NHS'
- ask you to sign into the NHS test and trace contact-tracing website
- ask for your full name and date of birth to confirm your identity, and postcode to offer support while self-isolating
- ask about the coronavirus symptoms you have been experiencing
- ask you to provide the name, telephone number and/or email address of anyone you have had close contact with from the two days before your symptoms started
- ask if anyone you have been in contact with is under 18 or lives outside of England.

Contact tracers will never:

- ask you for any form of payment or purchase a product
- ask any details about your bank account or social media
- ask for any passwords or PINs or to download software
- send someone to your home

Search online for ['NHS Test and Trace – how it works'](#) for more information. You will never be asked to disclose bank details or ring an expensive phone number beginning with 09 or 087 by a genuine Test and Trace team member.

Booking a test

Anyone in Hertfordshire with suspected coronavirus symptoms can book either a mail-order or drive-through test if they need one. For those who can't go online to www.gov.uk/coronavirus to book a test, or for anyone who needs additional help, a new telephone call centre is available –ring 119 between 7am and 11pm or 18001 0300 303 2713 if you have hearing or speech difficulties.

The coronavirus call centre can help you to book a test, answer enquiries about the testing process and what to do once you have your result, or chase up any delayed results.

Hertfordshire's mobile test sites are all open between 10am and 4pm. Tests currently take place in Watford, Hertford or Stevenage, depending which day of the week you book. Please note that Thursday and Sunday tests usually take place in Watford, however this week these will take place in Apsley, Hemel Hempstead. If you are booked into a test at Watford today or Sunday, please note the new site details are as follows: Hertfordshire County Council offices, Apsley Campus, Brindley Way, Hemel Hempstead Hertfordshire HP3 9BF.

Please bring a phone to the test centre if you have one.

Drive through testing expanded

From this Saturday, 13 June, a new regional drive-through coronavirus testing site is to open at the Tesco Headquarters in Shire Park, Welwyn Garden City. It will be open seven days a week and will offer assisted and self-administered tests.

For the opening weekend the site is planned to operate on Saturday from 2pm to 5pm and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. From Monday onwards the site will be open from 8am to 8pm every day. More appointments will be available each day.

The Welwyn Garden City site will sit alongside the other testing sites that people can already attend.

From next week onwards, tests will also be available at a mobile testing site in Hemel Hempstead on Wednesdays and Fridays. More information will be provided about this next week.

Antibody testing in Hertfordshire

Antibody tests are being rolled out in Hertfordshire, initially for NHS staff only. These tests use blood samples to detect the presence of antibodies that show whether a person has been exposed to COVID-19 in the past and has developed an immune response. This test currently can't tell a person whether or not they might catch the virus again and suffer from symptoms, or even spread the virus to others. There is not enough known about the virus at present to know whether those who have had it develop long-lasting immunity.

Whatever the outcome of someone's antibody test, they must continue to follow social distancing and hygiene measures and must isolate if they are a close contact of someone who tests positive for coronavirus.

The purpose of the antibody testing programme is to help the government and scientists to get a better understanding of how the virus is spreading and how different areas have been affected.

In future weeks, antibody testing will be extended to care home staff and residents, as well as patients having routine blood tests.

Current antibody tests require blood samples to be taken by a trained professional, using a syringe, which means they are not suitable to be used at home. Some finger-prick home tests have appeared on the market and are available to buy online or from high street pharmacies, but this type of testing has yet to be validated. Before spending money on a home test, buyers should be aware that their accuracy cannot be relied on and also that a positive test for antibodies doesn't mean you can be any less careful as explained above.

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