

Community-based COVID treatments – Changes to lateral flow test supply – November 2023

Key lines

- The NHS offers treatment to people with COVID-19 who are at the highest risk of becoming seriously ill. More information on who is eligible is available at www.nhs.uk/COVIDtreatments
- Local NHS organisations are responsible for arranging COVID-19 treatments. The way you get treatment may depend on where you live. Your [local integrated care board \(ICB\)](#) can give you more information.

How to get hold of COVID tests

- If you're eligible for COVID-19 treatments, you should keep rapid lateral flow tests at home.
- From 6 November 2023, eligible patients will be able to pick up free rapid lateral flow tests from a local pharmacy. This will replace the current online and telephone ordering services for free lateral flow tests provided by GOV.UK and 119.
- When picking up lateral flow tests, the pharmacy may ask you questions about your medical history to confirm you're eligible for free tests. If you have a copy of a letter or email sent to you by the NHS that says you're eligible for COVID-19 treatments, please bring this with you. A letter or email is not essential but it will help to more easily and quickly confirm your eligibility.
- Someone else can collect free tests on your behalf. If you do not have a friend, relative or carer who can do this for you then you may be able to book a [volunteer responder](#) by calling 0808 196 3646.
- Anyone collecting free tests on your behalf should provide the pharmacy with your details and any relevant letters or e-mails about COVID treatments, if you have them. The required details include:
 - The medical condition(s) confirming the patient's eligibility
 - The patient's NHS number (if available)
 - The patient's full name
 - The patient's date of birth
 - The patient's address

How to get treatment

- If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, take a test as soon as possible, even if your symptoms are mild. Only take a test if you have symptoms.
- If your test result is positive, call your GP surgery, NHS 111 or hospital specialist as soon as possible. They will be able to decide if you need a referral for an assessment for COVID-19 treatment.
- If your test result is negative, but you still have symptoms of COVID-19, continue to test once a day for the next two days.

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Q & A – Lines for answering queries only

I used to be able to order test kits online or by ringing 119 - Why has this changed?

The gov.uk ordering portal and 119 were established in response to the pandemic. As we learn to manage COVID-19 more in line with other respiratory illness, we need to move to routine NHS services that enable patients to access COVID-19 tests. Community pharmacies are well placed in local communities to provide this service for patients.

What if pharmacies aren't ready to provide tests on 6 November?

We anticipate that many pharmacies will have stock and be ready to provide free lateral flow tests from 6 November to eligible patients. However, to ensure a smooth transition, the current [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) and 119 telephone ordering services will not immediately close on 6 November. These services will remain available for a short period of time to provide patients with an additional way of getting hold of tests, while other pharmacies become ready to deliver this new service.

What happens if my nearest pharmacy doesn't have test kits when I need them?

We would advise you to visit other local pharmacies if your nearest one doesn't have any test kits in stock. They may be able to tell you which other local pharmacies are offering this service.

Patients are also advised to plan ahead and ensure that they always have sufficient test kits at home in advance of symptoms appearing (three tests for testing on three consecutive days, as required). This will avoid the need to urgently find a pharmacy to get hold of tests for immediate testing. Patients should not go into a pharmacy if they have symptoms of COVID-19.

Do pharmacies deliver test kits?

Some pharmacies may be able to deliver test kits. Please discuss this with the pharmacy.

How many test kits will the pharmacy give me?

The pharmacy will provide eligible patients with one pack of five tests.

How often can I collect test kits from the pharmacy?

Eligible patients can return for further packs when required. Patients should ensure that they have at least three tests available at home at all times to allow them to test for three consecutive days once symptoms appear. They should only use these tests when they have symptoms.

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My test kits are broken/damaged/incomplete. What do I do?

Please discuss this with the pharmacy that supplied your tests. They should be able to provide you with replacement tests.

Is the NHS writing to patients again? If they don't have a letter, how will they prove eligibility?

NHS England won't be writing out again to people as the digital systems that identify potentially eligible patients from their patient record are no longer available. A letter or email is not essential for getting hold of free tests from a pharmacy, but it will help to more easily and quickly confirm your eligibility.