**Asymptomatic Testing Programme Fact Sheet:**

**Scottish Primary, Secondary and Special Schools, and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) settings**

*The Scottish Government is working with the UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and other key partners to implement a testing programme for those without symptoms of coronavirus in schools/ Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School Age Children (SAC) settings. This document provides an overview of the key elements of the LFD Asymptomatic Testing Programme as of 9 August 2021. Further guidance and detailed information is signposted within this document, provided via local authorities and can be found on the document-sharing portal, Objective Connect.*

**Aims and objectives of the Asymptomatic Testing Programme**

The Scottish Government has worked with local authorities, schools and other key partners to put in place a testing programme using Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) for people without the symptoms of coronavirus (asymptomatic). This is part of the package of measures [to reduce the risk of coronavirus in education](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/#history) and childcare settings.

The programme will help to identify asymptomatic individuals in school environments or settings, at the earliest possible opportunity. By asking those who test positive and their close contacts to self-isolate, in line with national guidance, the likelihood of the virus being passed on is minimised. This is expected to enhance the confidence our communities have in classroom and early learning environments.

**Existing testing arrangements**

The asymptomatic testing programme does not replace the national testing policy for those with symptoms. School staff, setting staff and pupils who experience symptoms of coronavirus must self-isolate immediately and book a PCR test via [NHS Inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-get-a-test-if-you-have-symptoms).

**Individuals and institutions involved in this programme**

* All primary, secondary and special school staff in local authority, independent and grant-aided schools;
* all staff in ELC and SAC settings;
* all pupils (S1-S6) in local authority, independent and grant-aided secondary and special schools.

School staff include teachers, classroom-based support staff, administrative staff, facilities management staff (cleaners, janitors, etc.), school transport staff and other school-based staff who attend schools regularly and are critical to the effective delivery of school education.

**Key features of the programme**

We have worked with the UK Department for Health and Social Care and key stakeholders to agree a model of asymptomatic testing that is both effective and deliverable. The programme is designed to minimise burdens on staff, whilst reducing risks in schools and settings as part of a wider package of mitigations.

Key features of the programme include:

* Settings that wish to participate must adhere to the following documents to ensure legal requirements around GDPR and regulatory requirements from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MRHA) are met:
1. **Contract Agreement** (between DHSC and the setting): outlines the legal framework for delivering the testing programme and sharing information.
2. **Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)**: outlines the delivery process to follow to ensure the effective delivery of clinical, quality control and governance processes.
3. **DPIA and Privacy Notice**: outlines the legal framework for information sharing, roles and responsibilities around processing and sharing personal data.
* Schools and settings will be asked to distribute test kits to consenting staff and pupils, and to keep a log of which kits have been distributed to which individuals.
* Participants will take test kits home and, [following the instructions for use](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-self-test-help), perform the tests on themselves or with the support of a parent or guardian, twice weekly.
* They will then [register their result via NHS Inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-report-your-test-result), and results are shared with NHS Test and Protect. The testing journey is not complete until a result is registered either online or by phone, whether it is positive, negative or void.
* The actions that should be taken by individuals whether they receive a positive or negative result are clearly explained in the supporting guidance. A positive LFD test result requires a confirmatory PCR test to be taken.
* Anyone who has had a positive PCR in the previous 90 days should not be re-tested in this programme until the 90 days have lapsed.

**Participation in the programme**

We ask that staff and pupils are strongly encouraged to participate, in order to contribute to the wellbeing of their school communities and settings - this includes holiday periods. Staff and pupils should be encouraged to continue twice-weekly testing during holiday periods, in line with wider advice to society. They should also be reminded to take a test on the morning of, or day before, return to school following a holiday period. However the programme is voluntary – nobody should be required to undergo testing without consent, and nobody should be excluded from school or their setting if they do not wish to test.

Staff and pupils who decline to participate should continue to follow the usual national guidelines by [getting tested if they show any symptoms](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-get-a-test-if-you-have-symptoms) and to [self-isolate if they test positive.](https://www.nhsinform.scot/isolation)

**Effect of vaccination on the testing programme**

While vaccines reduce the risk of severe infection, the impact of the vaccine on transmission remains under review. Individuals who have been vaccinated may still carry and be able to transmit the virus, and as such are encouraged to continue to participate in the asymptomatic testing programme.

There is no risk that a positive lateral flow test will be a result of a vaccination– it will instead indicate an infection with COVID-19. The vaccine will not produce viral antigen, which is what LFD tests look to detect.

**LFD background**

A Lateral Flow Device (LFD) is an at-home test which detects the coronavirus antigen (protein) that is produced when a person is infected with coronavirus. These tests are fast and simple: they produce a result in between 15-30 minutes, that is easy to interpret and does not require a laboratory to be processed.

From August 2021 schools and ELC settings will transition from using Innova COVID-19 Self-Test (Rapid Antigen Test) to ACON Flowflex SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Rapid Test, for the purpose of the asymptomatic testing programme.

LFDs are effective at detecting a high viral load in an individual, and registering an appropriate positive result. These are people who are thought to be the most infectious.

LFDs are highly specific, which means that only a very small proportion of people who do not have coronavirus will receive a positive result (false positive). There is however, a risk of returning a false negative result when viral loads are low (e.g. in the early stages of infection). This is why the Scottish Government recommend two LFD tests 3 to 4 days apart, or regular testing, to enhance detection by picking up any cases which were not detected during the first test and to catch any new infections.

In order to produce an accurate result, the guidance for taking a test must be adhered to. If any part of the IFU is not followed correctly the test should be repeated following the manufacturer’s instructions.

LFDs used by the UK Government undergo a rigorous [validation process](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessment-and-procurement-of-coronavirus-covid-19-tests/protocol-for-evaluation-of-rapid-diagnostic-assays-for-specific-sars-cov-2-antigens-lateral-flow-devices) including evaluations by Public Health England and the University of Oxford. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) provides ongoing regulatory oversight.

**Different LFD tests:Innova COVID-19 Self-Test and ACON Flowflex**

All tests are equally suitable for their intended use. While there are some small differences between the devices, they have all been clinically evaluated and selected for use [based on performance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lateral-flow-device-performance-data).

Innova COVID-19 Self-Test [require swabs to be taken from the nose and throat](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-do-a-rapid-lateral-flow-device-lfd-test-at-home) and shows results in 30 minutes.

The ACON Flowflex Self-Test will instead require a nose-only swab and will show results at 15 minutes. ACON Flowflex Self-Test result must be read by 30 minutes, or the result will be void. This [step-by-step video shows how to do the ACON Flowflex LFD test](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLall_7dybQ) and how to assist a young person in doing the test.

Comprehensive guidance on self-testing is covered in the “Instructions for Use” (IFU) which come with every test kit – it is important that this is read carefully. The IFU is also available to download digitally via *Objective Connect* and [translated into a number of languages online](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-self-test-help).

**LFDs and different coronavirus variants**

LFD tests used in the national testing programme are routinely evaluated to detect early signals of changes in performance with emerging variants.

[Latest data](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/999867/in-vitro-and-clinical-post-market-surveillance-of-Biotime-SARS-CoV-2-Lateral-Flow-Antigen-Device-in-detecting-the-SARS-CoV-2-Delta-variant-B.1.617.2.pdf) shows the most widely used LFD tests are effective at detecting the Delta variant – now the most widely transmitted strain of COVID-19.

**Safety of LFD tests**

Ethylene oxide is used in the sterilisation of swabs. It is one of the most commonly used sterilisation methods in the healthcare industry – it is an important sterilisation method that manufacturers widely use to keep medical devices safe. Any traces remaining in the LFD or packaging after sterilisation are below limits that would be considered hazardous for health and comply with international standards.

The LFDs currently in use are all free from natural rubber latex, and are suitable for those with latex allergies. The swabs are supplied in sterile packaging, labelled as sterile, to protect from exposure to latex within the external environment. There is no guarantee, however, that the testing kits do not come into contact with latex during transportation or handling processes. If any part of the swab packaging looks damaged in any way, please do not use the test and report this via 119.

**Monitoring of test kits**

Schools and settings are required to keep a log of all of the test kits distributed to staff. This is a regulatory requirement, and helps ensure that test kits are being distributed to eligible individuals and that any consistent problems (e.g. individuals requesting more kits than expected due to successive void results) can be picked up. A template test kit log can be found on *Objective Connect.*

The UK Department of Health and Social Care may from time to time request that schools or settings share this log (or extracts from it) to assist in monitoring and responding to issues with test kits.

**Receiving a positive test result**

If a participant receives a positive result from their LFD at home, they must report the result online at [NHS Inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-report-your-test-result) (or by calling 119), self-isolate and book a confirmatory PCR test via [NHS inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-get-a-test-if-you-have-symptoms). We advise [visiting a (regional or walk-through) test site](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested/pages/covid-symptoms/#wheretestingtakesplace) as this is the quickest way to get PCR tested.

It is important participants begin self-isolation immediately after they receive the positive result from the LFD test, and do not wait until the result of their PCR test.

A positive test result via LFD will feed into the Test and Protect contact tracing system and commence contact tracing for the positive case. The person who has tested positive will then be offered a confirmatory PCR test if they have not already taken one.

If the PCR test result is negative, individuals will be contacted by Test and Protect who will advise them on what to do next. In most cases this will involve ending self-isolation and returning their school or setting, provided the individual continues to have no symptoms. In some limited circumstances the individual may be advised by Test and Protect to continue self-isolation if a risk assessment determines this to be appropriate.

**Close contact testing**

If a pupil or staff member has tested positive, they and their household should self-isolate and the household members should book a PCR test. The pupil or staff member should also inform the school or setting of their absence, and are strongly encouraged to report a positive case to their school or setting to support contact tracing activities.

Test and Protect may contact staff members and pupils/children who, after an assessment of the type of contact they had, are considered to have had contact with a positive case that suggests there is a higher risk of transmission, to inform them that they need to self-isolate and book a PCR test at [NHS Inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-get-a-test-if-you-have-symptoms). Only those requested to self-isolate by Test and Protect need to do so. Whole classes or year groups are now unlikely to be required to self-isolate.

All adult close contacts who are fully vaccinated for over two weeks and asymptomatic, can end self-isolation if their PCR test result comes back negative.

Close contacts who are under 18 years and 4 months can also end self-isolation if they remain asymptomatic and their PCR test result comes back negative.

However, if a close contact starts to show symptoms, they and other people living in the same household need to self-isolate immediately and the close contacts need to book another test. We specify 18 years and 4 months to allow time for individuals to become fully vaccinated.

Close contacts who have received a positive PCR test result in the past 90 days do not need to take a PCR test and are exempt from self-isolation if they are fully vaccinated adults or are under 18 years and 4 months. If they develop any new symptoms they need to self-isolate and book a test.

Adult close contacts who are not yet fully vaccinated still need self-isolate for 10 days, even if their test result comes back negative.

There is an [NHS Inform online guidance tool](https://www.nhsinform.scot/isolation) for households with possible coronavirus infection, which helps you to identify if you need to, and how long you need to self-isolate for.

**Other protective measures**

The testing programme does not reduce the need for other protective measures. A negative LFD result is not a guarantee that you do not have coronavirus. Those participating in the testing programme must continue to follow protective measures already in place, including wearing a face covering where necessary.

The Scottish Government have published [guidance on reducing the risks of COVID-19 in schools](https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/), to help ensure a low-risk environment for learning and teaching.

**What to do if there are problems with LFD tests**

Any incidents that could potentially impact the quality or safety of testing should be reported to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency MHRA.

If there is a clinical incident which led to, or has the potential for, harm (e.g. swab breaks in the mouth, bleeding, allergic reaction on using the kit etc.) this should be reported on <https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>.

Incidents occurring in a home setting (for example: something damaged, or missing or difficult to use in the kit, unable to log result) should be reported to **119**.This is not for seeking immediate medical care. Medical care should be sought through the usual route of contacting 111 or 999.

Schools and settings are also advised to report incidents (e.g. multiple staff not reporting positive results; reports from staff of multiple voids e.g. all voids in one pack or sudden overall increase in void reports, breakage and other issues with testing kits etc.) to NHS National Services Scotland on **0800 008 6587.** They can also be contacted via: nss.Covid19TestingSupport@nhs.scot.

**Programme operations**

If you have any issues accessing [*Objective Connect*](https://secure.objectiveconnect.co.uk/login)or require another member in your organisation to have access, please email: mailto:schoolscovidtesting@gov.scot for schools or mailto:childcaretestingprogramme@gov.scotfor childcare settings.

The Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) is the foundational document for the programme. The SOP details everything required to run the LFD asymptomatic testing programme, from clinical governance, to staff duties for those assisting with running the programme and distribution of test kits to participants. It is essential that those leading on testing for schools and childcare settings familiarise themselves with the SOP, which can be found on *Objective Connect.*

Step-by-step guidance for re-ordering LFD test kits can be found in a slide pack on *Objective Connect.* Test kits for the programme can be [re-ordered online](https://request-testing.test-for-coronavirus.service.gov.uk/) - you must have your Unique Organisation Number (UON) to do this.

NHS National Services Scotland can be contacted via telephone at 0800 008 6587, or via nss.Covid19TestingSupport@nhs.scot, in regards to further operational issues.

**If you have an urgent media query**

If you, your school or your childcare setting is approached by a member of the media, you can [contact the Scottish Government media enquiries portal](https://www.gov.scot/about/contact-information/media-enquiries/) for support.​