

Lateral flow device tests are in exceptionally high demand at the moment. There are several ways you can collect your free LFD tests, including from your local pharmacy, some community sites, and they're available to order online for delivery at home.

Picking up tests from a pharmacy is the quickest way to get a rapid test for most people. You will need to give the pharmacy a 'collect code' when you pick up the tests, which you can get on the government website.

Online ordering is very popular, and although there's no shortage of LFD tests, they occasionally stop taking orders online in periods of increased demand. This pause is temporary, and availability is refreshed daily. People are encouraged to re-visit the site later if they are unable to collect tests as more will be available.

From last Tuesday 11th January, people in England who receive a positive lateral flow device (LFD) test result for coronavirus are required to self-isolate immediately, without having to take a confirmatory PCR test.

It's a temporary measure while cases of coronavirus are so high across the UK. Rapid LFD tests are for regular use by people who do not show any of the three main symptoms of having coronavirus – the high temperature, new and continuous coughing, or change to their usual sense of taste or smell. If you have any of those symptoms, you're to self-isolate immediately and arrange a PCR test, online.

Right now, with the high prevalence of infection, it's highly likely that a positive lateral flow test will be a true positive, therefore a confirmatory PCR test isn't necessary. NHS Test and Trace have found that for every 10,000 lateral flow tests carried out, there are likely to be fewer than three false positive results.

There are some exceptions. People who have a positive LFD test result should still have a follow-up PCR test if:

- you wish to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment – to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment, you must have tested positive for COVID-19 following a PCR test or an assisted LFD test
- you have received an email or letter from the NHS because of a health condition that means you may be suitable for new COVID-19 treatments – if this applies to you and you develop any COVID-19 symptoms, you should use the PCR test kit that was sent to you in the post for this purpose; if you have not received a PCR test kit you can arrange to have a PCR test
- you are taking LFD tests as part of research or surveillance programmes, and the programme asks you to take a follow-up PCR test
- you have a positive day 2 LFD test result after you arrive in England

From Monday 10th January critical workers will be asked to take a LFD test on every working day, for an initial five weeks. Daily testing by critical workers is to help identify people who are carrying the virus and could spread it unknowingly and limit the risk of outbreaks within those workplaces.

'Critical workers' in this case include people who work in national security, transport, and food distribution and processing. It includes roles in Border Force, police, fire and rescue services control rooms, electricity generation, test kit warehouses and test surge labs.

Not included in this scheme are workers within adult social care or education, who already have a testing allocation with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

The County Council's target budget for 2022/23 was approved by the Cabinet in December but will not be finalised until February. The target budget calls for an extra £18.2 million to be spent on adult care and health in the new financial year, as well as an increase of £11.6 million for children's services if the budget is ratified - rises of 10%. This does however hide some horrifying cuts to service provision - services for Older People –cut by £7m, for people with physical disability - cut by £1.5 million, for Learning Disability Services cut by £6.1 million, for individuals to live more independently - cut by £1.4 million, and £1 million to be cut from mental health services.

The budget for highways will go up by £200,000 or 0.4% but with inflation taken into account this will be a £3.15million cut; communities and public health will also rise by 2.4%, again meaning a £2.85 million cut after inflation under this proposed budget. Overall, the county's spending is planned to increase from £580 million to over £629 million – a rise of 8%.

Devon's new director of finance, Angie Sinclair, warned that the pressures on services were continuing to mount – clearly this budget will have a massive impact on our roads and on services offered to residents. At the time I spoke at Cabinet and pointed out the risks, particularly with our Highways service which I believe is virtually at breaking point, at the time I did not know the full extent of the cuts to our social services in the County.

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