

Manchester Test and Trace

Thursday 11 February 2021

Overview on why enhanced community testing is taking place in Manchester

We have 4 cases of a new Covid mutation (E484K) that has developed from the Kent variant. These cases are in the Moss Side area. It's good that they have been identified, so that immediate action could be taken at an early stage. As an extra precaution we are also offering enhanced (surge) community testing from Tuesday 9 February in certain postcodes in Manchester. The full list can be found on [Manchester.gov.uk/covidtesting](https://manchester.gov.uk/covidtesting). Enhanced community testing means we can test specifically for E484K in a large number of people who do not show any symptoms – that way we can spot it early and act quickly.

People are being notified by letter if they should go for enhanced testing, which will run from three test sites initially from 10am-5pm for around two weeks.

- Our Lady's RC Church, Raby Street, M16 7JQ Opening times: 10am – 5pm Monday to Saturday
- Guru Nanak Dev Ji Gurdwara Temple, 15 Monton Street, M14 4LS Opening times: 10am – 5pm Monday to Sunday
- Arrahman Manchester Islamic Cultural Association, 16 Bedwell Street, M16 7LN 10am – 5pm Monday to Sunday

We will also be adding more local testing as the week progresses and volunteers will also begin knocking on people's doors to offer alternative testing for anyone who can't get out to a testing site. In addition, testing will also be made available for people who work in certain postcodes but don't necessarily live in the area.

It's really important to stress that this enhanced testing is for people who do NOT have Covid symptoms – and that's why they can go to the sites without an appointment.

Results will be in two stages. If someone tests positive for Covid they will get the result within 24-48 hours. Testing for the variant takes longer and if someone is positive for it they will hear around 2 weeks later. (Even if people test positive for the new variant, the action is exactly the same around immediate self-isolation, which they would have started or completed as soon as they found out they had Covid).

Finally, it's common for viruses to change – and we have been preparing for it. People can help by coming forward for testing if they are offered it and by following all the other safety and lockdown guidance as usual.

Enhanced community testing in the Moss Side area

Background: Viruses and how they can change

All viruses can change over time – and usually those changes are small and make little difference. Sometimes the virus can change (mutate) in a way that allows it to spread more quickly, or makes it resistant to interventions. (This is when they are called Variants of Concern).

Coronavirus can also change– and that’s why we have experts constantly monitoring it so that any changes can be identified and dealt with quickly.

The UK currently has 2 different variants – a UK variant originating in Kent and a South African variant. One of the best ways to deal with potential new variants is through enhanced testing (also called surge testing).

Enhanced community testing and what it means for Manchester

At the moment, there are very small number of cases of the mutated variant first found in Kent, in Manchester. This mutation is called E484K.

There are only 4 cases. It’s good news that they were identified so that immediate action was taken including self-isolation.

To stop the possibility of the mutation spreading we will also be doing enhanced community testing in certain post codes in Manchester, to help us pick up if there are any other cases. The council is working with Public Health England on this and NHS Test and Trace.

This is called enhanced testing, also known as surge testing - and it means that a lot of people who do not have symptoms can be given a test that is then sent to a lab where it will have extra testing for the new strain.

**There is no evidence that the vaccines are less effective with the new variant.
There is no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness.**

Surge Testing in detail and FAQ

- *Who is it for?*

The testing for the new variant will be offered to all people 16 years and over living or working in certain postcodes in Manchester. The full list of postcodes are on [Manchester.gov.uk/covidtesting](https://manchester.gov.uk/covidtesting). The testing is for people WHO DO NOT HAVE COVID SYMPTOMS.

People are being notified by letter if they should go for enhanced testing, which will run from three test sites initially from 10am-5pm this week up to, and including, Sunday. The sites are Our Lady’s RC Church, Raby Street, M16 7JQ (not open on Sunday); and Guru Nanak Dev Ji Gurdwara Temple, 15 Monton Street, M14 4LS (closed for prayer 12-1 on Sunday); and Arrahman Manchester Islamic Cultural Association at 16 Bedwell Street M16 7LN.

It’s really important to stress that this enhanced testing is for people who do NOT have Covid symptoms – and that’s why they can go to the sites without an appointment.

Alternative arrangements will be made for people who are unable to get to a test centre and the council will be in touch with them – they do not need to ring their GP.

- *What do I do if I have/ get Covid symptoms?*

Self-isolate and book a Covid test immediately by ringing 119 or by booking a test at nhs.uk/coronavirus, or via the NHS COVID-19 app.

- *How long for enhanced testing results to come through?*

Test results for the variants take longer for the lab to analyse and can take around 2 weeks. Normal Covid results come back within 24-48 hours. You don't need to isolate while you wait for them, **unless you have symptoms or you are a close contact of a positive case**.

If you test positive for Covid and then the lab sequencing identifies the new variant (takes around 2 weeks), you will be contacted again at that point by the Manchester Test and Trace Contact Tracing Team. This is so that we can identify any links between cases.

- *I've had the Covid vaccine do I still need to be part of this enhanced testing?*

If you've already had the vaccine, then please do still take a test. We know it can take a few weeks to build up immunity to the virus and this is an extra precaution to be on the safe side. It will also help us to understand if and how the virus has spread in the local community.

- *Do I need to be part of enhanced community testing if I have had a lateral flow test with a positive result?*

Yes, you will be asked to take part in the testing if your Lateral Flow Device test was positive in the past 90 days.

(For background, we are using lateral flow tests for frontline workers who do not have symptoms, but cannot work from home and may have more unavoidable contact with others. These are also swab tests and the results are available within 30 minutes because they do not need to be sent to a lab. This is all part of the city's ongoing plans for targeted testing at scale).

- *I had a Covid test (PCR) that came back positive in the last 90 days*

If you've tested positive with a PCR swab test within the last 90 days then you shouldn't have a test as part of the enhanced testing. The PCR swab test is the one that takes a day or two for the results to come back.

In general, what are all the different types of testing in the city?

For people with Covid symptoms:

PCR test booked at nhs.uk/coronavirus, via the NHS COVID-19 app or by calling 119 – and tests are available at fixed sites across the city. PCR is short for polymerase chain reaction – and is a swab test to the back of the throat and nose and results are sent for lab analysis. Results normally come back within 24-48 hours.

People who do not have Covid symptoms:

We are using lateral flow tests for frontline workers who do not have symptoms, but cannot work from home and may have more unavoidable contact with others. These are also swab tests and the results are available within 30 minutes because they do not need to be sent to a lab. This is all part of the city's ongoing plans for targeted testing at scale.

Enhanced Community Testing – is mass testing of people looking to check for a new variant or strain of Coronavirus. This is by PCR test, sent off for analysis, and the results can take around 2 weeks.

- *If I live or work in the enhanced test postcodes can I still go out to appointments?*

None of the current lockdown restrictions have changed. If you do not have any Covid symptoms, or you are not self-isolating, you can still go out for essential reasons like food shopping, work (when it cannot be done from home); health appointments and things like the Covid vaccination.

- *What can we all do to help?*

By following all the rules as normal around face covering, hand-washing, social distancing and keeping surfaces clean. Plus following current lockdown advice.

By still going to health and vaccination appointments, unless self-isolating

By remembering that we are all in this together.

Also, please remind residents that they may be eligible for £500 of financial support if they have a positive Covid-19 result, or if they have been asked to self-isolate by the NHS Test and Trace scheme. More details are here:

https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/info/500362/covid-19/8014/test_and_trace_support_payments