

Communications support for Local Authorities

COVID-19 Variant of Concern Testing

VERSION CONTROL

Version Control	
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1. Introduction

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The purpose of the pack is to support Local Authorities in their local comms about a targeted surge in PCR testing in their area, and to ensure consistency with national messages.

In consultation with Public Health England and NHS Test & Trace, Local Authorities will adopt different strategies to monitor and help suppress new variants. This may involve enhanced contact tracing, deployment of asymptomatic Mobile Testing Units (MTUs), settings specific / localised targeted testing, wastewater testing and increased genomic sequencing.

This pack provides Local Authorities communications teams with key messages, proactive and reactive communications templates, an overview of editable collateral in production, and includes relevant policies and guidance about communication activity.

If you have any queries about any content in this document, or would like to discuss your communication approach, please contact the Testing Communications Team: masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk

1.2 COMMS OBJECTIVES



- Drive up demand for testing in defined areas, including for people both with and without symptoms



- Raise awareness and understanding of **why people need to take a test, and why people must self-isolate if positive or a close contact** of someone who tests positive



- Raise awareness and understanding of **where to go to take a test**: home based, MTU or RTS/LTS

1.3 APPROACH

Locally-led comms approach.

- The comms approach on this issue will be **highly targeted and locally led**, supported by Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace.
- Depending on the VOC testing model being deployed, a national announcement by NHS Test and Trace may be required. This will be agreed during onboarding.
- If required, NHS Test and Trace will issue a national announcement to regional and national media, describing the targeted area and providing a link to local sites to set out the operational detail.
- A GOV.UK page lists areas targeted for surge testing: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/surge-testing-for-new-coronavirus-covid-19-variants>
- Following the announcement, Local Authority communications teams are responsible for planning and delivering communications and engagement to local people.
- NHS Test and Trace should be consulted in advance of production of any new materials which will require clinical validation relating to this surge in testing, e.g. instructions on how to take a test.

Operational details.

- Clear and coherent operational guidance cascaded to necessary delivery teams, including tracers and 119 service
- Full operational details will be cascaded via Regional Convenors via briefings coordinated by the NCRC

1.4 CONTEXT

On the 22nd February 2020 the Prime Minister set out the '[roadmap](#)' for the cautious lifting of Covid-19 restrictions within the United Kingdom. Before proceeding to the next step, the Government will examine the data to assess the impact of the previous step. This assessment will be based on [four tests](#), the fourth being '[our assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new Variants of Concern.](#)'

Relevant extracts from the roadmap:

- Where a dangerous Variant of Concern is identified and is likely to pose a real risk to the vaccination programme or public health, the Government will take a highly precautionary approach, acting fast to address outbreaks. The Government will also act quickly where an area sees unmanageable virus growth or the NHS is at risk, with local intervention centred on testing, communications and enforcement.
- The Government will ensure it has the tools to manage local outbreaks, as well as the means quickly and effectively to combat dangerous new Variants of Concern, both domestically and at the border, in close partnership with the Devolved Administrations.
- It is also possible that new variants of the virus may emerge against which current vaccines are less effective. As well as working closely with manufacturers, Government scientists are seeking to better understand the impact of some Variants of Concern on the vaccines currently in deployment.

1.5 TARGETED CASE FINDING TESTING MODELS (1/2)

Following the initial notification of Variant of Concern cases in an area, health protection teams will immediately implement public health actions, including enhanced contact tracing and targeted testing of contacts if required. The affected Local Authority may adopt any combination of the following measures to monitor and help suppress the variant. This will be agreed in consultation with Public Health England and the Department of Health and Social Care.

VOC testing interventions	Description
Widescale surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A surge in asymptomatic and symptomatic testing across a whole local authority area or across a number of local authority areas.• Delivery models may include asymptomatic MTUs, additional home testing and asymptomatic testing via existing infrastructure (RTS/LTS)• Additional testing made available to specific settings (universities, schools, workplaces) in affected localities• All positives with a high enough viral load prioritised for sequencing• Enhanced contact tracing activated for area in scope.• Duration 3-4 weeks
Targeted community surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A surge in testing within a specific area, postcode or community.• Delivery models may include asymptomatic MTUs, additional home testing and asymptomatic testing via existing infrastructure (RTS/LTS)• All positives with a high enough viral load in targeted areas prioritised for sequencing• Target population around index case (5-10K)• Enhanced contact tracing activated for area in scope.• Duration 1-2 weeks

1.5 VOC TESTING MODELS (2/2)

VOC testing interventions	Description
Targeted case finding within settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly targeted testing within a specific setting (e.g. workplace, school, business, street)• Delivery models may include an asymptomatic MTU or additional home testing• Any identified positive cases with a high enough viral prioritised for sequencing• Duration < 1 week
Enhanced sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All positives with a high enough viral load in defined areas prioritised for sequencing
Enhanced contact tracing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specially trained contact tracers will contact all positive cases in VOC areas.
Wastewater monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Genomic sequencing of viral genetic material found in wastewater samples within targeted areas.

Section 3.1 covers the proposed **communication approach and key messages for the different testing operations** deployed.

2. Key principles

2.1 APPROVALS PROTOCOL

- There are number of aspects of communication that will need NHS Test and Trace approval:
 - **Press notice** – if you are planning to issue a local release, the template in this guidebook should be used with a quote from NHS Test and Trace and DHSC included. Final versions should be shared in advance for fact-checking and awareness. This will ensure accuracy from a national policy, clinical and technology perspective.
 - **Media** – please inform masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk if you would like to arrange a media visit to a PCR site as we will need to ensure any comms and media activity is aligned.
 - NHS Test and Trace should be consulted in advance of **production of any new materials** which will require clinical or technology validation relating to this surge in testing.
- All media enquiries about the national testing programme should be directed to DHSC press office. DHSC media centre contact information is available [here](#), including details of out of hours contacts.

2.2 MONITORING AND REPORTING: DATA HANDLING AND SECURITY

- PHE's Outbreak Surveillance Team has developed a reporting solution that is currently being shared twice weekly with Local Authorities and Health Protection Teams through the PHE's Local Portal. A version of this report will be now be updated and published weekly on a Thursday lunchtime in a short-standalone publication, as part of the PHE variants data release, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/covid-19-surge-testing-outcomes-reports-management-information>
- This data report will include findings relevant to your areas which are in the public domain and can support your local communication with your communities. However, this data is shared alongside a number of caveats, as it combines Test and Trace operational data with PHE verified genomics results. **This report is not intended to be an official statistic or an evaluation and will be updated as test and sequencing results are received.**
- If you would like to share findings from this report with your communities, please ensure that this information is appropriately caveated. Suggested lines are provided on slide 27 – 29.
- Any media questions relating to the overall surge testing programme or relating to national sequencing and testing capacity, operations or strategy should be [directed to the DHSC Press Office](#).

Media data sources:

Wherever possible, you should refer to the below sources of published statistics for media enquiries:

Coronavirus (COVID-19) statistics are published daily on the [coronavirus in the UK dashboard](#), including regional breakdown. This is updated daily and covers testing, cases, healthcare and deaths.

[Progression dashboard](#) shows both the rate of triage for coronavirus (COVID-19) using NHS Pathways, and the number of people confirmed by a lab to have coronavirus (a positive test).

[Weekly statistics for NHS Test and Trace \(England\) and coronavirus testing \(UK\)](#) show national aggregate and experimental statistics from the NHS Test and Trace service and related documents.

Public Health England regularly publishes [genomically confirmed case numbers of COVID-19 variants](#) of concern and variants under investigation.

If you are unsure whether you can provide data contact: masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk and if requested by the media, please refer the journalist to the DHSC main press office. DHSC media centre contact information is available [here](#), including details of out of hours contacts.

3. Announcement Handling, Media Visits and Exit Comms

3.1 COMMUNICATION APPROACH FOR DIFFERENT TESTING MODELS (1/2)

VOC Testing Model	Comms considerations	National comms	Local comms	Assets
Widescale community surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-profile, intensive model which is likely to generate national public and media interest • Requires national and local coordination and a coherent message to ensure that public health is speaking with one voice • Requires clear steer on purpose • Requires public reassurance • Requires link to lockdown roadmap • Requires clearly defined criteria to stand down response and support exit comms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press notice • National / regional media opportunities (PHE / DHSC led) • Approval of local press notice • Approval of media visits to MTUs • Responsible for providing communications support and assets to local teams • Update to GOV.UK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local press notice(s) • Regional comms led by Regional PHE Director for Public Health • Liaison with local media • Responsible for delivering comms to citizens – including call to action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters / flyers • Social media assets and activity boost • Paid for marketing support • Street community champions / street teams • NHS App notifications • GP notifications • Stickers • Digital ad-vans • Self-isolation checklist and mythbusters (available shortly) • App posters and materials
Targeted community surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium-profile, intensive model which may generate national public and media interest • Requires clear steer on purpose • Requires public reassurance • Requires link to lockdown roadmap • Requires clearly defined criteria to stand down response and support exit comms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press notice • Update to GOV.UK • Approval of local press notice • Approval of media visits to MTUs • Responsible for providing communications support and assets to local teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local press notice • Liaison with local media • Responsible for delivering comms to citizens – including call to action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surge testing assets, including translations • Social media graphics • Self-isolation checklist and mythbusters (available shortly) • App posters and materials

3.1 COMMUNICATION APPROACH FOR DIFFERENT TESTING MODELS

(2/2)

VOC Testing Model	Comms considerations	National comms	Local comms	Assets
Targeted case finding within settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlikely to generate national media or public interest Requires central support to local teams and agreed comms for reactive purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No national comms Reactive Q&A Responsible for providing communications support and assets to local teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reactive comms Responsible for liaising with settings (e.g. school) Responsible for delivering comms to citizens – including call to action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generic variant testing assets to support testing in localised areas or specific settings
Enhanced Sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlikely to generate national media or public interest Requires central support to local teams and agreed comms for reactive purposes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No national comms Reactive Q&A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No proactive public comms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A

3.2 KEY MESSAGES (1/2)

VOC Testing Model	What?	Why?	How?
Widescale community surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in partnership with [insert local authority], additional surge testing and sequencing is being deployed in [insert area]. There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness, or that the regulated vaccine would not protect against it. [Insert number] cases of [insert variant] have been detected in [insert area]. Extensive investigations have been undertaken through partnerships with DHSC, PHE, NHS Test and Trace and the local boroughs, including enhanced contact tracing of all known cases. [check if accurate] Although some of the cases involved in this cluster were found in [insert settings], these settings in general do not pose any increased risk to individuals of catching a COVID-19 variant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive surveillance of coronavirus has identified [insert variant] in [insert area] Now we are widening our focus to the general public and it is really important everyone comes forward and takes a PCR test so we can identify any further cases of the variant as soon as possible to help prevent onward spread. Additional testing and sequencing will be deployed to quickly and effectively combat the spread of the VOC in the area. [check if accurate] Although the cluster we have identified is significant, total COVID-19 cases in these areas remain low and the public health advice has not changed. Remembering the basics of Hands, Face, Space and Fresh Air as we meet others outside will help protect against all COVID-19 variants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People living / working / learning within [insert area] are strongly encouraged to take a PCR COVID-19 test when offered, whether they are showing symptoms or not. People with symptoms should book a free test online or by phone to get tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent home. Those without symptoms should visit their local authority website for more information: [insert URL] ➤ By getting tested as soon as possible, everyone in the affected areas will be helping to ensure we stay on top of this outbreak and reduce the risk of the further transmission. ➤ Insert localised call to action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get your test at [insert details] ▪ Don't forget to register your test to get your result ▪ Return your home PCR test to a drop-off collection point and not by post ▪ If you test positive you must self-isolate ▪ Close contacts of those who test positive must also self-isolate
Targeted community surge testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working in partnership with [insert local authority], additional surge testing and sequencing is being deployed in [insert area]. There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness, or that the regulated vaccine would not protect against it. [Insert number] cases of [insert variant] have been detected in [insert area]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive surveillance of coronavirus has identified [insert variant] in [insert area] which cannot be traced back to international travel. Additional testing and sequencing will be deployed to quickly and effectively combat the spread of the VOC in the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People living / working / learning within [insert area] are strongly encouraged to take a PCR COVID-19 test when offered, whether they are showing symptoms or not. People with symptoms should book a free test online or by phone to get tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent home. Those without symptoms should visit their local authority website for more information: [insert URL] ➤ Insert localised call to action: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get your test at [insert details] ▪ Don't forget to register your test to get your result ▪ Return your home PCR test to a drop-off collection point and not by post ▪ If you test positive you must self-isolate ▪ Close contacts of those who test positive must also self-isolate

3.2 KEY MESSAGES (2/2)

VOC Testing Model	What?	Why?	How?
<p>Targeted case finding within settings</p> <p>(REACTIVE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [Insert number] cases of [insert variant] have been detected in [insert area]. Everyone living/working at [insert location] is being asked to take a test. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequencing positive results for coronavirus in [insert area] has identified a case of the [insert variant] which may be linked to [insert area/institution/workplace]. Everyone living/working at [insert location] is being asked to take a test. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People living/working/learning within [insert area] are strongly encouraged to take a PCR COVID-19 test when offered, whether they are showing symptoms or not. <p>➤ Insert localised call to action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get your test at [insert details] Don't forget to register your test to get your result Return your home PCR test to a drop-off collection point and not by post If you test positive you must self-isolate Close contacts of those who test positive must also self-isolate
<p>Sequencing only</p> <p>(REACTIVE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Health England is deploying additional genomic sequencing to continue monitoring the situation closely and may take further precautionary approach as required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extensive surveillance of coronavirus has identified the presence of the [insert variant] in [insert area]. We are deploying additional genomic sequencing to continue monitoring the situation closely and may take further precautionary approach as required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People with symptoms should book a free test online or by phone to get tested at a testing site or have a testing kit sent home. Those without symptoms should visit their local authority website for more information: [insert URL] <p>➤ Insert localised call to action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get your test at [insert details] Don't forget to register your test to get your result Return your home PCR test to a drop-off collection point and not by post If you test positive you must self-isolate Close contacts of those who test positive must also self-isolate

3.3 DRAFT LETTER TO RESIDENTS

PLEASE TAKE THE TIME TO READ THIS LETTER IN FULL

COVID-19: VARIANT OF CONCERN IN YOUR AREA - ADDITIONAL TESTING AVAILABLE NOW

[INSERT LOCAL AUTHORITY] is working with NHS Test and Trace to test **[INSERT AREA]** residents for Covid-19.

As part of Public Health England's proactive sequencing work, PHE has found evidence that **[INSERT VARIANT]** has been identified in **[INSERT AREA]**.

Every person living in **[INSERT AREA]** over the age of **[INSERT AGE]** is strongly encouraged to take a COVID-19 test this week, even if they are not showing symptoms.

If a person tests positive, has any symptoms, or are contact traced following contact with someone who tests positive, they should self-isolate immediately.

This testing initiative is aimed at finding cases of Covid-19 in areas where cases of **[INSERT VARIANT]** have been identified, to help gain a better understanding of how prevalent the variant is and if there is any further community transmission taking place.

There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness. People should continue to follow national guidance and remember 'hands, face, space, fresh air'.

We are making testing more easily available.

- If you have coronavirus symptoms you should continue to book a test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or via the NHS COVID-19 app
- **[INSERT INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO GET A PCR TEST IF YOU DO NOT HAVE SYMPTOMS]**
- **If you do test positive it is essential that you self-isolate and engage with contact tracers when they call. Contact tracers will never ask you for money or bank details**
- The more cases of the variant we find, the better chance we have at suppressing it. Please help to keep your community safe by getting tested so we can find the variant and protect you and your loved ones.

For more information please visit **[PLEASE ADD YOUR LOCAL CALL TO ACTION, INCLUDING URL]**.

3.4 DRAFT LETTER TO SCHOOLS IN SURGE AREAS

Dear [insert name],

As you may be aware, we have announced today a programme of additional testing in response to an identified case of the [INSERT VARIANT] in [INSERT AREA].

There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness. Although the risk to the wider community is considered low, as a precaution, [INSERT COUNCIL], working in collaboration with PHE and NHS Test and Trace, is taking swift and decisive action to deploy additional surge testing in the targeted area. Positive cases will be sent for sequencing of genomic data to help increase understanding of COVID-19 variants and their spread.

[EDIT BELOW PARAGRAPH AS APPROPRIATE]

We are encouraging everyone living in [INSERT AREA] aged [INSERT AGE] and over, even if they have been vaccinated, to take a PCR test at [INSERT AVAILABLE DELIVERY CHANNELS]. We will also be encouraging whole households, including children, to get tested with a home PCR test kit in targeted areas.

The increased testing will begin on [INSERT DATE] and is being introduced in addition to existing extensive local testing. In combination with the current national restrictions, this testing will help us to monitor and suppress the spread of the virus.

The same national guidance continues to apply in areas where new variants have been identified and education settings can remain open. Twice weekly rapid testing should continue in educational settings and parents and other adults in households with children at school or college, who do not have symptoms, should continue to access the regular, rapid coronavirus testing.

For more information please visit [PLEASE ADD YOUR LOCAL CALL TO ACTION, INCLUDING URL].

3.5 LOCAL PRESS TEMPLATE (1/2)



SURGE TESTING TO BE DEPLOYED TO CONTROL SPREAD OF COVID-19 VARIANT IN [INSERT AREA]

Extensive surveillance of Covid-19 has identified a small number of cases of the Covid-19 variant **[INSERT VARIANT]**, in localities across England, including **[INSERT AREA]**, that cannot be traced back to international travel **[INCLUDE/DELETE AS REQUIRED]**. All cases are now self-isolating and robust contact tracing has taken place to trace their contacts and ask them to self-isolate.

Working in partnership with NHS Test and Trace, every person living in **[INSERT AREA]** over the age of **[INSERT AGE]** is strongly encouraged to take a PCR Covid-19 test this week, even if they are not showing symptoms.

Testing will, in combination with measures such as hands-face-space and following national guidance, help to suppress and control the spread of the virus, while enabling a better understanding of the new variant.

Positive tests with a high enough viral load will be sequenced to identify any further spread, enabling a better understanding of the variant and identifying if there are any more cases of this particular strand of the virus in the area. If someone tests positive, they must self-isolate immediately and pass on details on their contacts to NHS Test and Trace.

[INSERT INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO GET A TEST]

Dr Susan Hopkins, Chief Medical Advisor for NHS Test and Trace said:

“As part of our proactive sequencing work, we have identified cases of COVID-19 variants in a number of areas across England. A small proportion of these cases have no link to international travel suggesting that there are some cases in the community.

PHE and NHS Test and Trace are monitoring the situation closely and appropriate public health measures such as increased testing and contact tracing are being put in place where necessary.”

3.5 LOCAL PRESS TEMPLATE (2/2)

[INSERT NAME] Regional Director at Public Health England **[INSERT REGION]**, said:

“The UK has one of the best genomic systems in the world which has allowed us to detect the variant **[INSERT VARIANT]** here in **[INSERT AREA]**. I urge everyone offered a test to take it up to help us to monitor the virus in our communities and to help suppress and control the spread of this variant.

“The most important thing is that people continue to follow the guidance that is in place – limit your number of contacts, wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, keep your distance and cover your face. If you test positive by any method, you must isolate to stop the spread of the virus. **If you have been in close contact with someone who tests positive you must also self-isolate.**”

Notes to Editors

- Working in partnership with local authorities, NHS Test and Trace is targeting specific areas where the variant has been found. A list of locations deploying surge testing is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/surge-testing-for-new-coronavirus-covid-19-variants>
- People with symptoms should book a test in the usual way. People without symptoms should visit their Local Authority website for more information
- People should continue to follow the national guidance and remember ‘hands, face, space and fresh air’.
- We know that mutations form a part of the virus cycle and we are well prepared to sequence new variants and assess what action may need to be taken.
- If a person tests positive, has any symptoms, or are contact traced following contact with someone who tests positive, they should self isolate immediately.

3.6 CORE NARRATIVE, TOP LINES & FAQ

You will have received a briefing note alongside this communications guidance pack which includes:

- Background information
- General VOC testing, top lines & Q&A
- Specific lines on different VOCs
- Variants under investigation, top lines & Q&A
- Supporting materials

If you have not received this document, you can request an up-to-date version from: masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk

3.7 MEDIA VISIT GUIDANCE (1/2)

Media engagement is a useful tool to drive testing uptake. A script to support local stakeholder interviews has been prepared and is included in this document.

Please inform NHS Test and Trace communications team (masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk) if you would like to arrange a media or VIP visit to any PCR test sites doing asymptomatic testing.

Site access and photography	Media visits
<p>Please confirm the following details and we coordinate all necessary approvals for you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name of the test site / location• Proposed date / time• Purpose of the visit• Visitors• Do you intend to do any filming / photography on site? How is the footage going to be used?• Who will be taking the picture / videos, i.e. name of the agency?• Do you need anything from the operational staff on site?• Please confirm there will be no media presence. <p>After clearances, the T&T Comms Team will liaise with the site team to finalise logistics arrangements.</p>	<p>Please confirm the following details and we coordinate all necessary approvals for you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name of the test site / location• Proposed media outlet• Proposed date / time• What is the angle of the media package?• Who are your spokespeople? What would they cover?• Would you like a quote from DHSC? <p>After clearances, the T&T Comms Team will liaise with the site team to finalise logistics arrangements.</p>

3.7 MEDIA VISIT GUIDANCE (2/2)

- Numbers of media attendees and length of media visits should be limited to avoid disrupting testing operations. The visits are typically limited to be 30-60mins (max).
- For visits to other PCR testing sites, the media have used a sign at the entrance of the site asking people if they were comfortable being interviewed or photographed and, if so, explaining that a camera would follow and film them and then do a short interview.

Instructions for invited media:

- **Permissions** – Please ensure that before agreeing filming, you have the permission of the site, and all organisations with staff on the ground.
- **Spokespeople** – They can only talk about their role and aspects of the local activity they are involved with. Any other questions about the national testing programme should be directed to the DHSC press office.
- **Those tested** – Please protect those being tested and their identities if they have not granted permission for filming. Please avoid faces and number plates unless permission has been given.
- **Safety protocols** – Please follow all safety guidance, including maintaining two metre distance and wearing a face mask at all times
- **Operational staff** – Please be respectful of the teams on site and their time. They are working extremely hard and their focus is on completing tests safely and quickly.

3.8 PROPOSED MEDIA SCRIPT

- Public Health England has recently identified X cases of the **INSERT VARIANT**, in **INSERT REGION** *which do not appear to have any links to travel... this suggests that there might be some small amount of spread locally in this area [delete as appropriate].*
- At the moment, we have no evidence to suggest that this variant is any more severe than others.
- But to suppress any onward spread of the virus, we are going to be conducting extra testing for anyone living in **XX** postcode area.
- Those tests will then be sequenced, to identify if there are any more cases of this particular variant of the virus in the area.
- We are strongly encouraging everybody who lives in **XX** to continue to follow the national guidance in the usual way, but to take a test, whether or not they have symptoms
- People with symptoms should book a test in the usual way. People without symptoms should visit **XX** for more information.
- **INSERT LOCAL CALL TO ACTION**
- You will only be required to take one PCR test, but I do urge every single person to take one, and if you test positive, to **engage with contact tracers** and self-isolate to stop the spread of the virus.
- And remember, the best way to stop the spread of COVID-19 is to remember: hands, face, space and fresh air and to follow the national guidance.

3.9 EXIT COMMS APPROACH

- Local Authorities will be **responsible for leading on communications to confirm once an area deploying surge testing has completed its allocation of PCR tests** in the radius of the confirmed case(s). NHS Test and Trace will provide support and advice as required.
- NHS Test and Trace will need to be **sighted on any release confirming cessation of surge testing** to ensure alignment with national communications and so that GOV.UK can be updated accordingly.
- Exit comms typically happens at two points:
 1. Final day of surge testing – focus on thanking communities for their support
 2. When sequencing data has been published – focus on sharing outcomes from the surge testing operation
- LAs should also use both opportunities **to reiterate that symptomatic testing will continue to be available locally via the national network, and to confirm the local provision of asymptomatic testing** (for example via Community Collect, Pharmacy Collect, ATS etc.)
- Example communications are included on the next slide.
- All media enquiries about the national testing programme should be directed to DHSC press office. DHSC media centre contact information is available [here](#), including details of out of hours contacts.

3.10 EXIT COMMS: EXAMPLE FINAL DAY MESSAGING

- Surge testing in **INSERT AREA** has now been completed. **Thank you to everyone** who has come forward to get tested.
- **All positive COVID-19 tests with a high enough viral load from our targeted testing will be sent for genomic sequencing.** This will help us to understand the spread of COVID-19 variants locally.
- **Symptom-free testing will continue to be available to all**, regular rapid testing is available through home testing, workplace testing, community testing, collection from PCR test sites during specific collection windows, testing on-site at schools and colleges, collection from participating pharmacies.
- You must continue to follow the **national guidance and remember, hands, face, space and fresh air.** The best way to protect yourself, your family and your friends is to get vaccinated when you are called to do so
- **If you have coronavirus symptoms, you should book a test** at nhs.uk/coronavirus, via the NHS COVID-19 app or call 119. **If you test positive you must self-isolate. Contacts of those who test positive will also be asked to self-isolate.**

3.11 DATA SHARING: APPROVED LINES (1/2)

NHS Test and Trace and the PHE Outbreak Surveillance Team publish data on surge testing [here](#). Below are lines to support local communication on findings:

1. Local lines based on identification of further VoC cases

- Thank you to everyone in **[insert targeted area]** who has come forward to get tested. It is really important that we understand variants of concern and that we rapidly identify new cases locally.
- **[Insert number]** were taken as part of local surge testing, with **INSERT POSITIVE** cases identified. Preliminary data indicates that **INSERT NUMBER of** cases of the **INSERT VARIANT** have been identified in the areas we have tested.
- **[insert Local Authority]** will continue to work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England to deploy appropriate public health interventions as required
- **OR** We have agreed with the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England that will expand / carry out additional testing in **[insert area]**.
- **[Insert call to action]**
- There is currently no evidence that this variant causes more severe illness, or that the regulated vaccine would not protect against it.
- Every positive case identified through testing is another person who can be isolated and another set of contacts traced. Every positive case we find can help us break chains of transmission and suppress the variant in our community.
- Please help to keep your community safe by getting tested so we can protect you and your loved ones.

2. Local lines based on identification of no further VoC cases:

- Thank you to everyone in **[insert targeted area]** who has come forward to get tested. It is really important that we understand variants of concern and that we rapidly identify new cases locally.
[Insert number] tests were taken as part of local surge testing, with **[insert numbers]** positive cases identified. No VOC cases have been found in the samples analysed so far from the **[insert numbers]** area however surveillance continues.
- Every positive case identified through testing is another person who can be isolated and another set of contacts traced. Every positive case we find can help us break chains of transmission and suppress the virus in our community.
- Public Health England and **[insert Local Authority]** will continue monitoring the situation closely and will take further action as required.
- You must continue to follow the national guidance and remember, hands, face, space and fresh air.
- The best way to control the virus and protect your friends and family is to get vaccinated when you are called to do so

3.11 DATA SHARING: APPROVED LINES (2/2)

Background narrative

- As part of our proactive sequencing work, we have identified cases of new COVID-19 variants of concern in a small number of localities across England.
- Working in partnership with the local authorities, additional testing and genomic sequencing is being deployed to targeted areas where variants have been found. Positive cases identified as part of this additional testing are sent to the laboratory network for genomic sequencing. This process typically takes around two weeks, although we are working to fast-track this and are piloting a new technology known as 'genotype assay testing' which can potentially halve the time it takes to detect a variant of concern. The guidance for everyone who tests positive, whether it is with a variant or not, is to self-isolate with their household immediately.
- To enable effective whole genome sequencing, a sample needs to have a high level of viral genetic material. Surge testing often includes asymptomatic testing and samples from asymptomatic positive cases often have a low viral load, which may be insufficient for successful sequencing.
- Where an individual is identified as having a variant of concern or under investigation, the Health Protection Team in their area is immediately notified so they can deliver an enhanced public health response.
- Every positive case identified through testing, whether or not the sample can be sequenced, is another person who can be isolated and another set of contacts traced, **who must also self-isolate**. Case finding and compliance with isolation will break chains of transmission and help us to suppress the variant where it has been detected.
- The government is committed to publishing data on surge testing, to ensure it is accessible to the public. This is why we have released the provisional figures for operational data on testing, sequencing and variants of concern/variants under investigation detection from surge testing sites and home testing to local Health Protection Teams, and have made this information available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/covid-19-surge-testing-outcomes-reports-management-information>
- All PCR test results in surge testing regions are included in the overall weekly statistics published by Public Health England, available via the <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/testing> dashboard.
- A guidance page is maintained listing areas where surge testing is currently taking place: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/surge-testing-for-new-coronavirus-covid-19-variants>

4. Resources and Guidance for localising assets to support community testing

4.1 WEB COPY FOR MTU BOOKING PORTAL

To minimise mixing between symptomatic and asymptomatic people at testing sites, some asymptomatic MTUs are not listed on the national GOV.UK booking platform.

Local Authorities may find it helpful to create appointment booking platforms to support demand management at site.

If your Local Authority has stood-up a local appointment booking platform, you will need to make it clear that this local system is for appointments only, and that those visiting an asymptomatic MTU will need to register at the site to receive their results.

Please see some suggested copy for your local appointment booking portal below:

*This booking platform is to register for an appointment at **X** testing site.*

To receive your test result, you will also need to register your details at site. After you have completed your test, a member of the staff at site will hand you a test registration card with a bar-code, which includes instructions of how to register your test to receive your result.

If you have any issues with registering for your result, please speak to the staff at site or call 119.

4.2 MARKETING ASSETS – GET TESTED

Surge testing for new variant assets (posters, flyers and social) have now been developed and are available here:
<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/>

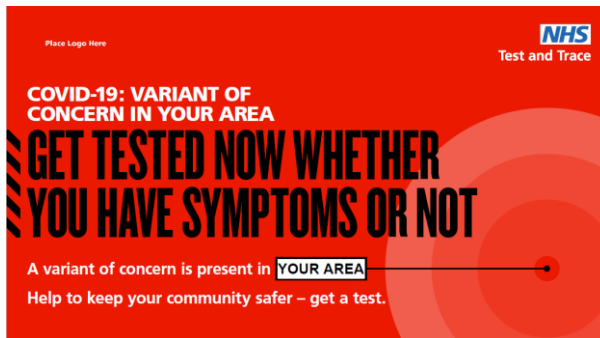
Posters (A3/A4), leaflets (A5), social assets available in two variations.

You will need to insert your own call to action with a URL and information on where to get a test:

GET TESTED:

“2021.05.11_Variant_Gettested_May_”
(published May 2021)

These assets are available as editable PDFs – all Local Authorities should be able to co-brand, insert a postcode and insert their localised call to action without the need for editing software.



Translations of v. April 2021 posters are available in:
Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi (India), Punjabi (Pakistan), Romanian, Slovak, Somali, Sylheti, Urdu, Welsh
<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/translations-variant-surge-testing/>

4.2 MARKETING ASSETS – GET TESTED

Surge testing for new variant assets (posters, flyers and social) have now been developed and are available here: <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/>

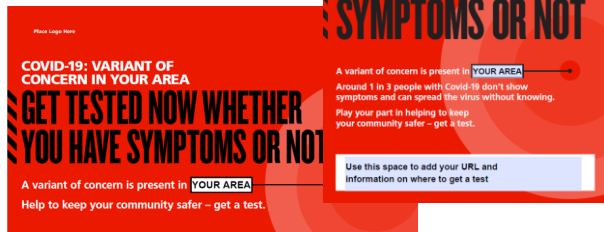
Posters (A3/A4), leaflets (A5), social assets available in two variations.

You will need to insert your own call to action with a URL and information on where to get a test:

1 **Recommended: Option 1**

“2021.05.11_Variant_Gettested_May_”
(published May 2021)

These assets are available as editable PDFs – all Local Authorities should be able to co-brand, insert a postcode and insert their localised call to action without the need for editing software.



2 **Option 2. “2021.04.01_Variant_”**
(originally published Feb 2021)

These assets are editable in editing software so Local Authorities can co-brand and insert a localised call to action.



Translations of Option 2 posters are available in:

Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi (India), Punjabi (Pakistan), Romanian, Slovak, Somali, Urdu, Welsh
<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/translations-variant-surge-testing/>

4.3 PROMOTING KIT REGISTRATION

It is important that individuals taking a PCR test in a surge testing area register to receive their results.

When someone does not register to receive their results, we are unable to alert the individual to their result and cannot commence contact tracing or other interventions. This means that infectious people (including those infected with a Variant of Concern) may be spreading the virus in the community.

To help minimise the potential for unregistered PCR test kits, please do use the following assets to promote kit registration locally.

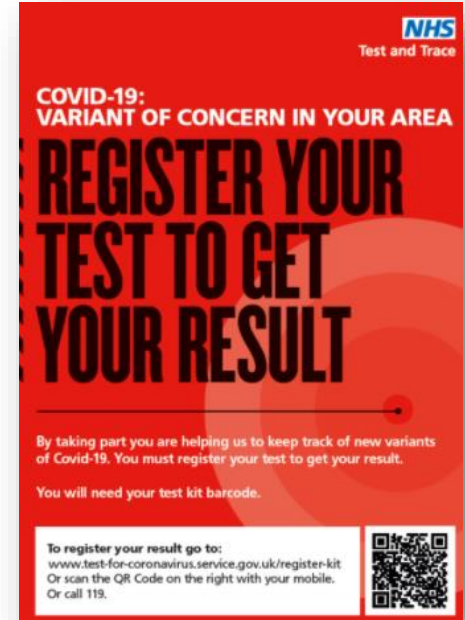
Assets (including a leaflet, poster / signage) to support this are available here:

<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/>

The following translations are available on the PHE resources centre here

<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/variant-surge-testing/resources/translations-variant-surge-testing/>:

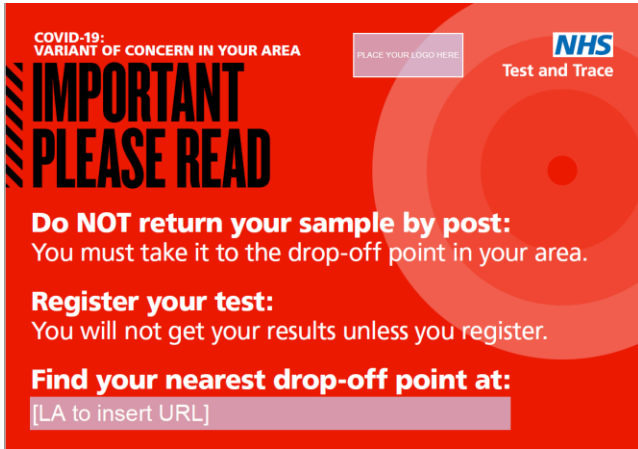
- Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, French, Gujarati, Italian, Kurdish, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi (Indian) Punjabi (Pakistan), Romanian, Somali, Spanish, Tamil, Tigrinya, Urdu



4.4 RETURNING HOME TEST KITS

It is really important that individuals taking their PCR tests at home are aware of the appropriate channels to return their kits to a designated drop-off collection point and not by post.

Please arrange printing out the sticker below and instruct staff responsible for distributing home test kits in your areas to label up each test kit before distributing to affected communities.



The high res generic and editable versions of the sticker are available upon request. Please reach out to: masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk

4.5 SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

We recommend reinforcing the following messages on your own channels:

- Covid-19: New test site is now available at [\[insert location\]](#) for those with no symptoms. Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- Covid-19: New test site available for those with no symptoms at [\[insert location\]](#). Protect you, your loved ones and your community. Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- The more cases of the variant we find, the better chance we have at suppressing it. New test site available for those with no symptoms at [\[insert location\]](#)
- Everyone in the area with or without symptoms should get tested to help suppress the new variant. Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- Covid-19: Variant of concern in your area: Get tested at [\[insert link\]](#). Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- Covid-19: More home test kits made available for those with and without symptoms. Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- Covid-19: Additional home test kits available in your area. Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- Voluntary PCR testing is available for those with no symptoms at [\[insert location\]](#) to help us find any cases of the new variant and to help suppress it. Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- Covid-19: Enhanced testing available now in [\[insert location\]](#). Click here to read more [\[insert LA link\]](#)
- Testing is available for those with coronavirus symptoms - a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or a loss or change of smell or taste. Anyone with one or more of these symptoms should book a test online at nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119.

4.6 THE NHS COVID-19 APP – VoC Notifications

The NHS Covid-19 App has functionality that can support your communications and VoC management

Local Messaging

The app can be used to notify the public at a local authority level of the presence of a variant.

A standard VoC message stating, “a new variant of Covid-19 is spreading in your area....” will appear as a pop-up notification on phones when it is first activated.

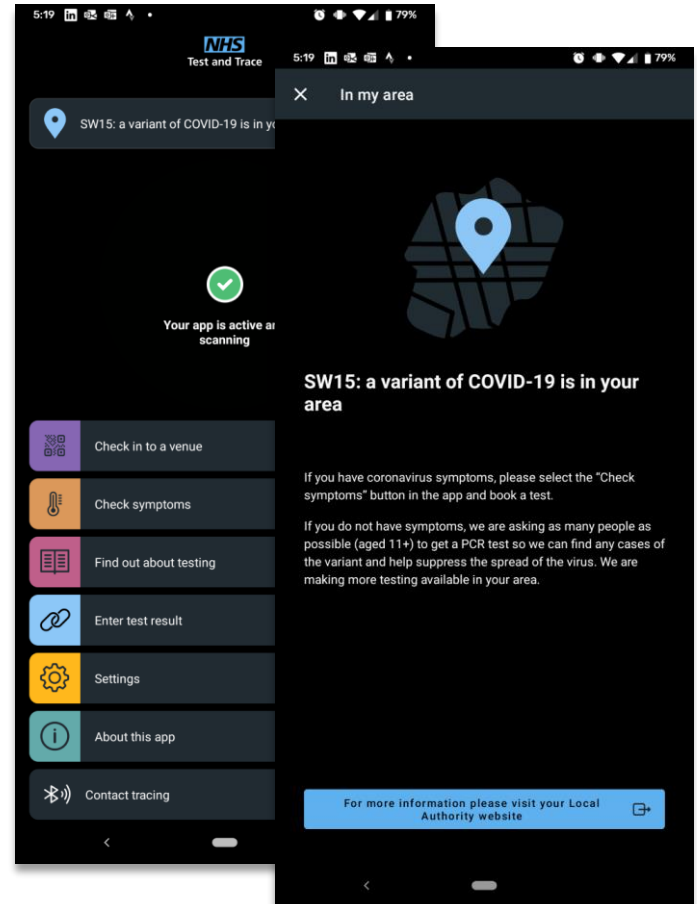
The message will go to all users in the local authority as the app does not collect full postcodes. Local Authorities can choose the number of days the message remains visible to users in their area.

To use app VOC messaging to support your area

Please indicate this in your targeted case finding proposal and flag to the VOC Comms Team.

It will take approx.48 hours for this to appear on phones after you confirm your requirements to the VoC communications team.

In addition, the standard App functionality can support rapid contact tracing and we advise that you promote the use of the App in VOC areas. Key messaging and assets to support the app are available here: <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/the-nhs-covid-19-app/>



5. Accessibility considerations: Targeting underrepresented groups

5.1 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)

1

Communication activity should be planned specifically for digitally excluded people; so we get better at reaching them:

1. Increasing physical signposting through traditional and printed media (*e.g. newspapers, borough leaflet drops*) and ensuring these are targeted and multi-language
2. Leveraging trusted community organisations *e.g. GP surgeries, faith centres etc*

2

The rationale and the importance of regular testing must be clearly communicated, as:

- Digitally-excluded users are unlikely to do weekly testing unless mandated
- The difference between *symptomatic* and *asymptomatic* testing is confusing to users
- Users need to know how they are going to get tested and what this will involve

3

In addition, digitally excluded people are often also vulnerable and need additional assurance around:

1. The assistance provided in going through the testing process, the reliability of the test and effectiveness of self-testing
2. The reasons why personal data is collected and how it is used
3. The security measures in place at test sites and pick-up locations to enable social distancing

5.2 CONSIDERATIONS FOR UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS



Lack of or limited digital access

Users who struggle with literacy are unlikely to use the internet alone and would not use the internet as their main source of coronavirus information



Reliance on family and friends

Users tend to rely on family and friends to support them with tasks that require reading and sense-making, but not all users have access to that support



Trusted & respected local figures

Respected figures and organisations that people listen to can help build trust in the service and dispel existing myths and alternative narratives



Familiar settings and staff

Testing in familiar places could reduce feelings of fear when it comes to testing and may increase uptake



Guidance is confusing and does not land with the community

Guidance is confusing and inconsistent and does not resonate with the user group. Thus, people get alternative narratives from social media and WhatsApp



Visual methods of passing information are beneficial

Pictures, videos, icons and physical signage are beneficial to users as they are visual and easier to quickly understand



Multigenerational households and financial responsibilities makes isolation difficult

Having to self-isolate and being taken out of the workforce, also prevents people from wanting to get tested



More support is needed for those isolating, especially the elderly and those who live alone

More support for the elderly who have had to isolate and haven't been able to attend the Temple as usual, as well as for those who live alone and may require assistance



Stigma associated with testing positive for coronavirus

People avoid getting tested and do not discuss when they have been tested due to the fears of being labelled as someone who has tested positive



Fear and uncertainty exists around contact tracing

There is fear in the community around contact tracing and people are reluctant to give their information or those of others and do not want to participate

5.3 TRANSLATED TEST KIT INSTRUCTIONS



- Home test kit Easy Read instructions are available in the following languages to support door-to-door testing: Hindi, Bengali, Polish, Indian Punjabi, Pakistani Punjabi, Slovak, Somali, Urdu, Gujarati, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Welsh.
- You can access these at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/testing-for-coronavirus-at-home>

Get in touch

For questions about anything in this guidebook or to discuss your communications plans please get in touch: masstestingcomms@dhsc.gov.uk