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### Coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do

#### Stay at home

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

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Public Health  
England

Guidance

## Priorities for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) testing

Updated 3 April 2020

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### Latest updates to this page

2 April 2020: revised sections 3 and 4

## 1. Scope

This guidance provides a priority order of testing for periods when triaging of requests is required. It also advises on priorities for repeat testing given the demand for testing.

See [current case definitions](#).

## 2. Prioritisation

**Group 1 (test first):** patient requiring critical care for the management of pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) or influenza like illness (ILI)†, or an alternative indication of severe illness has been provided, for example, severe pneumonia or ARDS

**Group 2:** all other patients requiring admission to hospital\* for management of pneumonia, ARDS or ILI

**Group 3:** clusters of disease in residential or care settings, for example, long term care facilities and prisons (usually samples from 5 cases are sufficient in these settings)

† ILI: fever  $\geq 37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$  and at least one of the following respiratory symptoms, which must be of acute onset: persistent cough (with or without sputum), hoarseness, nasal discharge or congestion, shortness of breath, sore throat, wheezing, sneezing.

\*admission to hospital: a hospital practitioner has decided that admission to hospital is required with an expectation that the patient will need to stay at least one night.

## 3. Repeat testing

If the patient is producing sputum or is intubated, a lower respiratory tract sample should be preferentially tested (rather than upper respiratory tract samples) as SARS-CoV-2 can be present in the lower respiratory tract despite being undetectable in the upper respiratory tract.

If a suitable lower respiratory tract sample is negative, repeat tests are not needed.

## 4. Step down testing

Priority testing for viral clearance should focus on:

- the severely immunocompromised patients to support the optimal use of side rooms, or where side rooms are not available
- any testing which optimises patient flow through the hospital, such as:
- long-stay patients who are unable to otherwise be discharged
- those being discharged to a household where someone who is in extremely vulnerable person is being shielded

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