



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Lord Bethell
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation*

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Tom Tugendhat MBE MP
By email to: tom.tugendhat.mp@parliament.uk

14 January 2021

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 September to Matt Hancock, about testing for COVID-19. Please accept my apologies for the long delay in replying, which has been caused by an unprecedented volume of correspondence in recent months.

Currently, there are record numbers of tests available, but we have seen a rise in the number of people who are not eligible for testing coming forward and applying for one. We are therefore introducing clear and improved messaging in all our channels and at sites that testing is for those who have symptoms, or who have specifically been told to get a test by a clinician or local authority.

However, patients should expect and receive the highest standard of care from NHS testing services and facilities. When a patient feels that these standards have not been met, there is a Coronavirus Testing Helpdesk to resolve any issues.

The Coronavirus Testing Helpdesk number is 0300 303 2713. The call handler should make every effort to resolve the complaint in the first instance. If your constituents have already called the helpline and were not satisfied with the response, they, or you on their behalf, may wish to raise a formal complaint directly to the central complaints mailbox at scas.covid19testingcomplaints@nhs.net. The complaints team will then triage and respond.

More generally, we are continuing to scale up our testing capacity even further by expanding our network of testing sites and laboratories as well as investing in new testing technologies. There is capacity to process over 750,000 tests per day.

We have rolled out over 780 testing sites, including 421 walk-through local sites and 82 drive-through sites. When booking a test, people are offered testing at the nearest site with availability that day. The median distance people are travelling to booked, in-person tests is now 2.6 miles.

Additionally, we are prioritising the processing of samples from areas of enhanced concern to ensure that these results are delivered as quickly as possible. This means that some people are experiencing slight delays in the return of their tests.

We have announced an investment of £500 million in next generation COVID-19 tests, such as saliva tests and rapid turnaround tests that can deliver results in just 20 minutes.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bethell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

LORD BETHELL