

Russian internet giant offers free coronavirus tests

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This transmission electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 -- also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19 -- isolated from a patient in the US. Virus particles are shown emerging from the surface of cells cultured in the

lab. The spikes on the outer edge of the virus particles give coronaviruses their name, crown-like. Credit: NIAID-RML

Russian internet giant Yandex has launched a free coronavirus testing service for the Moscow region as Russia boasts of one of the world's highest testing rates.

Yandex, which created the country's most popular search engine as well as taxi and shopping apps, has set up the service as part of an alliance between internet companies and the Russian [sovereign wealth fund](#).

Initially it offered at-[home tests](#) only to those aged 65 or over but from this week the service is available to anyone who applies online.

A medic will come to an applicant's flat in [protective clothing](#) and take swabs.

The site stresses the test is important to identify those who have the virus without symptoms, as well as for those who have to use [public transport](#)

"It's important that it's possible for people to get tested who are continuing to work but can't afford to pay for a [laboratory test](#)," Yandex public relations officer Sana Paritova said in an e-mailed response to questions.

She said that the service, which promises a test result in three days, is receiving online applications "from several thousand people" every day.

There is currently a backlog due to laboratories not being able to test so many per day, which Yandex hopes to resolve shortly, she said.

The testing only covers Moscow and some areas of the capital region, which have seen most of Russia's 57,000 confirmed cases.

Russia says it has carried out more than 2.2 million tests for coronavirus, which it says puts it in second place in the world, behind the United States.

Several commercial laboratory chains offer paid-for tests. They are obliged to inform authorities about those who test positive.

The Yandex project is funded by the company as well as donations from individuals and other companies, while the tests are carried out by commercial laboratories.

Yandex also makes it possible for members of the public to donate to cover tests for others.

Paritova said the role of Russia's sovereign wealth fund (RDIF) was in boosting the number of accredited [test](#) systems and laboratories authorised to carry out tests.

Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin at the end of last month announced an alliance between the RDIF and major Internet companies Yandex and Mail.ru to focus on expanding testing for coronavirus.

The RDIF has invested in the development of rapid tests by a Russian-Japanese company called EMG.

Yandex publishes an online self-isolation index of cities in Russia and other countries where many use its apps and services, giving an indication of whether people observe lockdown rules.

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