

France announces 'large scale' virus testing campaign

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France said on Thursday it was launching a "large scale" coronavirus testing campaign in a bid to identify any dormant infection clusters.

Some 1.3 million people in the Ile-de-France [region](#), which includes Paris, will receive vouchers for a [virus](#) test, Health Minister Olivier Veran told Le Monde newspaper.

Even those who display no symptoms would be eligible, he said.

People who live near previous hotspots will be targeted in a bid to identify asymptomatic carriers who may be transmitting the virus without knowing it, said the minister.

The tests would determine if a person is currently infected, not whether they had had the virus previously.

The government will start with a pilot [campaign](#) in Ile-de-France and three other regions—between them accounting for about three-quarters of people who required [intensive care](#) for coronavirus complications.

"We are in an experimental phase to see if this corresponds to what the French want," Veran said of the testing campaign.

"The experiment may be extended to other regions later."

Figures released on Wednesday showed that 29,731 people had died in the COVID-19 outbreak in France to date, though the rate has slowed to 11 deaths in 24 hours.

Veran told the newspaper that "the peak of March-April is behind us, but we have not finished with the virus", and urged people to continue to "avoid large gatherings and risky behaviour" that could help the virus spread.

A lack of systematic testing at the height of the epidemic means statisticians can only model the real number of people infected.

In May, Veran admitted there had been "a gap between the theory and the practice" of testing in France, with many people holding a doctor's prescription for a [test](#) unable to get them.

France has ramped up its capacity since then, and said in May it would be able to carry out 700,000 per week.

Until now, tests were on prescription and reserved for people with possible coronavirus symptoms, or those who had been in contact with a sick person.

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