

# UK government hits back over virus test concerns

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The British government on Tuesday admitted increasing demand for coronavirus tests was posing problems after hospital bosses warned delays in the system were jeopardising healthcare services.

"I don't deny that it is an enormous challenge and when you have a free service, it's inevitable that demand rises," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told parliament.

But he rejected claims of a spiralling backlog, which have triggered complaints that people with COVID-19 symptoms were unable to get tests and delays in getting in results.

"The backlog is actually falling and is less than one day's test processing capacity," he said.

Hancock spoke after criticism from the chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents the heads of hospital trusts in the state-run National Health Service in England.

Chris Hopson told Sky News television there were "current capacity problems with the testing regime", and urged the government to prioritise frontline health workers.

Staff absences in major cities had jumped as people tried to get tests, forcing them to stay off work and compounding delays to routine care that have worsened since the outbreak.

"We have now got cases where patients who should be being treated, we can't treat them because they can't get access to a test," Hopson said.

"So, for them that's a real problem."

Hancock insisted that capacity for testing was "at a record high" and 9,278 tests were carried out on Monday in the 10 areas of the country worst-hit by a surge in cases.

LBC radio on Monday said no coronavirus tests were available in those areas.

At the weekend, it was reported that a backlog of 185,000 swab tests were sent for processing in laboratories in Italy and Germany.

Because of the surge in demand for tests, the UK government has promised to increase capacity and urged people only to get a test if they are showing symptoms.

According to the latest government statistics, more than 225,000 tests on average were carried out daily, while capacity was at nearly 375,000 tests per day on September 10.

Britain, which has been the worst-hit country in Europe registering nearly 42,000 deaths, has seen a resurgence in the virus in recent weeks.

More than 3,000 new cases were recorded on three consecutive days over the weekend, for the first time since May.

## **'World beating' regime**

Prime Minister Boris Johnson had pledged to have a "world-beating" testing and tracing operation in place by June.

But alongside concerns about the testing regime, there are fears the tracing system is still failing to reach the required number of people to work effectively.

A much-touted smartphone app to help trace people is yet to launch in England.

Scotland, which runs health from the devolved administration in Edinburgh, launched an app last week using technology developed by Apple and Google.

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