

Oxford to trial new COVID-19 test for individuals without symptoms

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The University of Oxford will take part in a new pilot scheme to assess the use of Lateral Flow Tests (LFTs), a new COVID-19 test designed to identify asymptomatic individuals with the virus.

The Lateral Flow Test (LFT) is one of a number of new testing technologies for COVID-19 currently being trialed across the UK. It is hoped it will help identify those most at risk of spreading COVID-19 (those who are infectious, but not aware of this) and enable them to alter their behavior accordingly, thereby breaking the chains of transmission and reducing the infection rate.

The pilot scheme, developed by Oxford in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and Durham University, will help us understand how best to use the technology and how it could be operationalised in the [real world](#) as part of broader COVID-19 testing strategies beyond the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) [test](#).

The LFT produces results within a few minutes. Individuals swab their nose and throat to collect a sample, and then insert it into a tube of liquid for a short time. LFTs have already been validated and undergone clinical testing. If LFTs are able to detect enough people with the virus before they get symptoms, they could help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Oxford is now rolling out the Feasibility and Acceptability of community COVID-19 rapid Testing Strategies (FACTS) study within the University community to assess how to organize using LFTs on a regular basis.

Staff and students within particular areas of the University will be offered LFTs as part of the study and will be trained in how to take the test, process the test and record the results using NHS Test and Trace. At this moment in time, the study has been opened up to Merton College and St Hilda's College. Participation is completely voluntary. Further details are being communicated to those directly involved.

The study will track how many people take up the offer of testing, how many carry on doing the tests regularly, and how many cases of COVID-19 are detected. It is envisaged that participants will be tested over a few weeks.

The test currently more commonly used in the NHS is the RT-PCR (reference test polymerase chain reaction) test. All students or staff who receive positive tests (LFTs) in the pilot will require a confirmatory PCR test in accordance with current public health guidance. These are readily available through the NHS or the University's Testing for COVID-19: Early Alert Service (EAS).

Richard Hobbs, Nuffield Professor of Primary Care Health Sciences at the University of Oxford and lead on the study said: "The results of this study will be important because some of the spread of COVID-19 happens before people get symptoms and self-isolate. Further, some people with the infection never get symptoms, especially young people. This is one reason that universities across the world have suffered outbreaks of COVID-19 as students go back to campus.

"The primary purpose of the study is not whether the University adopts this test, but to help uncover how to organize such screening in the national and international fight against COVID-19."

Professor Gavin Sreaton, Head of Medical Sciences Division at the University of Oxford said: "Through Oxford's Testing for COVID-19: Early Alert Service (EAS) the University has been operating a comprehensive testing service, seven days a week, for all staff and students out of two testing pods, one at the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (ROQ) and the other at the Old Road Campus (ORC) in Headington since August.

"We are keen to do everything we can to support the local, national and

international effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This new research pilot of LFTs aims to gather important information to further the national testing efforts. Our priority is to engage with the most promising research and innovations in testing, and to support delivery of those we think will have the most impact for the wider community."

Professor Louise Richardson, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford said: "We have all looked on with pride as our medics have worked tirelessly to develop a vaccine, discover therapeutics and assume a leading role in the global effort against COVID-19. I am very pleased that this new FACTS research pilot will provide an opportunity for a much larger segment of our community to participate in advancing knowledge of this virus and effective means of countering it."

Provided by University of Oxford

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