

Rapid testing for COVID-19 being tested in London care homes

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Queen Mary staff and student volunteers at a care home. Credit: Queen Mary, University of London

In a UK first, Queen Mary University of London is leading a clinical trial of a new rapid COVID-19 testing system that delivers results in under an hour. Working with the East London Health and Care

Partnership, up to 2,000 staff and residents in 50 care homes are being recruited to see how effective rapid daily COVID-19 testing is at reducing rates of infection, hospitalization and deaths.

At the moment, outbreak control in homes and communities is hindered by limitations in testing. It can take days to swab a person suspected of having COVID-19, send the sample to a laboratory and receive the results.

The rapid PCR based testing system in this trial has been developed in the UK by Novacyt, and uses the COVID-19 PCR test already in use in NHS laboratories, but provides an accurate result with an hour.

Residents, staff and visitors in 25 care homes will receive daily testing on the rapid testing machines which each have the capacity to process up to 100 samples a day. Meanwhile, as a comparison, the other 25 care homes will receive the standard central laboratory testing once a week.

The trial team comprises researchers, [medical students](#) and laboratory experts from Queen Mary and Novacyt, who are also using a new and more convenient simple nose swab for daily testing, instead of the more common and invasive nasopharyngeal swab.

Rapid COVID-19 testing for those at highest risk

Professor Jo Martin from Queen Mary University of London who is leading the study said: "This work has the potential to bring a new rapid COVID-19 testing system to those at highest risk, and help interrupt community transmission. If found to be successful in care homes, it could be very useful in a wide range of settings, helping to make a quick diagnosis and keep an environment free of COVID-19. With rapid daily testing, we can report back to the [care home](#) on the same day, so that they can take action to reduce transmission in their care home and

prevent outbreaks into the wider community. By undertaking this study in the diverse East London community, we're hoping to protect one of the most vulnerable groups in the UK, and the frontline staff who are caring for them."

Henry Black, Chief Finance Officer, NHS North East London Commissioning Alliance said: "Working with our partners in East London we are at the forefront of detecting COVID-19 infections. Rapid testing is essential if we are to reduce transmission of the disease in social care settings. The testing equipment is also portable enough to be used in community situations and we believe it will be a valuable tool in tackling any local outbreaks."

Mobile testing for outbreak management

Binu Varghese, Care Manager at Beis Pinchos Nursing Home in Stoke Newington, Hackney, which is taking part in the trial, said: "Our primary focus is the care of our residents and staff. We are delighted to take part in this trial. We hope this innovative testing technology helps our people and can be used in care homes across the world."

Novacyt Q16 PCR machines in the trial use the PrimerDesign genesig and exsig COVID-19 PCR tests and are much smaller and mobile than traditional PCR machines, meaning that they have potential to be taken to any site and used in outbreak management.

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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