



FAQ – New testing strategy

Date:

12 March 2021

Extended testing strategy

1. Why is the testing strategy being extended?

In order to optimally monitor the situation as the steps towards reopening are taken, the Federal Council is massively extending its testing system.

The aim is for 40% of the mobile population to be tested once a week. Together with contact tracing, the vaccination programme, the rules on hygiene and social distancing and the existing precautionary measures, testing represents an important component of the package of measures that will allow for the coronavirus pandemic to be effectively controlled.

2. How is the new testing strategy organised?

The new testing strategy will enter into force from 15 March. It is based on the following three pillars:

- The testing of symptomatic individuals
- Broad, repetitive testing at educational establishments, companies and institutions
- The testing of individual people / self-tests

The focus of the strategy is placed on the first two pillars. They will serve to control the pandemic through testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine measures.

The third pillar will serve to reduce transmissions within individuals' personal surroundings.

3. Can the closure measures taken by the Federal Council be lifted with the introduction of widespread testing?

The extended testing strategy is one of several measures that can keep the number of cases stable or even reduce them. If the number of cases falls, it may be possible for some of the measures to be repealed. Over the medium to long term, ensuring vaccination coverage within the population will be required for the definitive lifting of all measures.

4. How much will the federal government's testing offensive cost?

The costs for the extension of the testing strategy will amount to more than CHF 1 billion for 2021. The basis for this is formed by the Covid-19 Act, which is limited until the end of the year.

Further information:

Federal Office of Public Health, Communications, www.bag.admin.ch

This publication is also available in German, French and Italian.

Testing in general

5. Is testing appropriate if I do not have any symptoms?

Yes. The problem with this pandemic is that many people who carry the virus do not exhibit any symptoms. We need to identify these individuals in order to break chains of infection as quickly as possible. Those who get tested regularly will be contributing to keeping the number of cases stable or even reducing them.

6. Why should I get tested regularly?

Broad and repetitive testing should primarily be conducted at the workplace or at school. These are places where people who are especially mobile and who come into contact with many others spend time. If we test regularly in these places, we can identify centres of infection in good time and break chains of infection.

7. Why should I test myself at home?

The self-tests serve to reduce transmissions within individuals' personal surroundings. Individual tests can, for example, be used prior to visiting friends or relatives or before taking part in activities with a risk of transmission. It is for this reason that self-tests are helpful for asymptomatic individuals.

8. Should I get tested at home or at work/school? Are both necessary?

Broad, repetitive testing at work or at school can systematically detect the virus. It is therefore very important to get tested regularly at work or at school if the possibility exists. Self-tests serve to supplement these efforts.

9. Should children and young people also get tested?

Yes. Children and young people, in particular, exhibit symptoms of an infection with the coronavirus less frequently than is the case with adults. They also have a large number of social contacts and are very mobile. A test can detect an infection at an early stage and prevent further people becoming infected.

10. I would like to take a flight to go on holiday and need a test. Is this also free?

No. A PCR test is usually required to travel. A PCR test is only free if you have symptoms or if you need to get the result of a positive rapid antigen test confirmed.

Testing at companies and institutions

11. Which companies should test regularly?

All companies, schools and institutions can take part in the testing programme. Participation is voluntary.

12. What are the benefits for companies that test regularly?

Broad and repetitive testing at companies will allow for cases of infection to be detected at a very early stage, meaning that a further spread of the disease among employees can be prevented. This will ultimately result in fewer employees having to go into isolation or quarantine, which will be extremely beneficial, in particular, for companies at which work has to be performed on site. In a next phase, it will be checked whether broad and repetitive testing at companies may also lead to quarantine exemptions or the lifting of the home-office obligation.

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13. How will the Federal Administration participate in the repetitive tests?

The Federal Administration is also planning repetitive tests and is developing corresponding concepts.

14. Is participation in workplace testing compulsory?

Generally speaking, participation in testing is voluntary. Employers are only entitled to have their employees tested within the limits laid down under mandatory law, which includes, for example, the protection of employees' privacy. Testing has to be justified with reasons relating to work performance or the protection of other employees or third parties (clients, patients). However, all circumstances need to be taken into account, including the epidemiological situation and the possibility and availability of other protective measures.

15. Does it make sense for private associations to test their members regularly?

Pooling tests are only planned for schools, companies and institutions. Private associations should, however, test their members prior to activities with an increased risk. These include, for example, sports clubs prior to training sessions or music clubs before rehearsals. In this case, antigen rapid tests are especially advisable, also because the results are immediately available.

Dealing with test results

16. What happens if a pooled test is positive?

In the event of a positive pool test, the members of the pool will be asked to undertake an individual SARS-CoV-2 analysis. The members of the pool must go into self-isolation until the result is available.

17. What do I need to do if the self-test is positive?

It is important that individuals with a positive rapid test or self-test take a PCR test. They should have their test result confirmed by means of PCR diagnostics. The individual should go into self-isolation until the result is available. If the PCR test is positive, the person in question must remain in self-isolation.

18. Is there no need for further action if I get a negative test result?

A negative test should not lead to a false sense of security and ill-advised behaviour. Wearing a mask, complying with the hygiene measures and keeping your distance from others remain necessary and very important.

19. Are institutions, restaurants or event organisers allowed to demand a negative test result?

It remains open as to whether it will be allowed to define a negative test result as a requirement for participation in certain events or accessing specific areas.

Self-tests for at home

20. When will the self-tests be available?

Just how quickly it will be possible to use a self-test will depend on, among other things, the requests that are received. Realistically, the beginning of April is likely.

21. Where can I get the self-tests?

The distribution of self-tests should only be possible through pharmacies. The five tests per person that will in future be given free of charge each month can be obtained using your health insurance card.

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Federal Office of Public Health, Communications, www.bag.admin.ch

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