Christmas Travel Test (Lateral Flow Device) FAQs

Who should get a test?

Should I take a Christmas Travel Test if I have COVID-19 symptoms?
No, you should not get a Christmas Travel Test. You should instead book a test via the Testing for COVID-19: Early Alert Service, and follow the advice you are given when you receive your result.

I have received a negative test result from the Early Alert Service (EAS). Do I still need to take a Christmas Travel Test?
Yes, you should still take the Christmas Travel Test before you travel. This is because tests provide results at a single point in time.

Can I take a Christmas Travel Test even if I plan to stay in Oxford?
The Christmas Travel Tests have been primarily set up to help those who are travelling. Those who are staying in Oxford do not need to take the test. If your plans change and you are going to travel, online testing sessions will be available until 13th December. If you are leaving after that date, further online testing sessions can be arranged by contacting helen.kay@oriel.ox.ac.uk.

I am a postgraduate research student. Can I take a Christmas Travel Test?
If you are intending to travel during the Christmas vac, online testing sessions will be available until 13th December. If you are leaving after that date, further online testing sessions can be arranged by contacting helen.kay@oriel.ox.ac.uk.

Can staff take the Christmas Travel Test?
No, not at this stage.

Taking the tests

How long do Christmas Travel Tests take to do, and how many do I need to take?
The tests are very quick to complete, and you will provide a result within 20-30 minutes. You should have two tests three days apart in the week before you leave Oxford. This is because the first test may show negative even if you are incubating the virus. A second test is then more likely detect the infection if that is the case.

How do the tests work, and do they cause any discomfort?
The tests detect viral proteins made by replicating virus. It involves using a plastic kit to swab your nose and throat. This can be slightly uncomfortable but this shouldn’t deter you from getting tested.

How do I book a test?
You will book an hour-long testing session online through EAS. Please try to book at least 12 hours in advance so that the College can inform the Lodge that you will be picking up a test kit. Your booking confirmation will include a URL to a Teams meeting and start time for your booking session. Please do not join the session before the start time and please do not be late. On your session, there will be a trained supervisor who will guide you through self-administration of the test and answer any questions you have.
Do I have to book an online session for both tests?
No, you only need to be supervised for your first test. You will then be able to self-administer your second test without supervision.

How do I pick up a test?
Once you have booked a testing session on EAS, the Lodge will be informed and you may pick up a testing kit bag which will include 3 tests -- one for your supervised session, one to be self-administered three days later, one spare (just in case) and a bottle of buffer solution. The buffer needs to be kept to use in all 3 tests – please do not dispose of it after your first test. Tests and buffer must be stored at room temperature – please do not place in the fridge or near a radiator. You will also be given a yellow disposal bag.

If I don’t use the third test, what do I do with it?
Please return your intact unused test to the Lodge.

Can I take a test without booking a testing session through EAS?
No. Tests will not be distributed to those who have not booked a test.

How do I report the result of the test?
It is your responsibility to report both of your test results, be they negative or positive, to EAS. Once you have received the results of your test, please log back on to EAS and register the result.

How do I dispose of the test once it’s complete?
Please put all tests into the yellow rubbish bag supplied. Once you have completed your 2nd test, please seal the bag and dispose of it in the yellow bin – either at the bottom of sc 34 on the Island Site or behind Larmenier at Rectory Rd.

How can I be sure that the tests are accurate?
These tests have been extensively validated both here in Oxford and in Public Health England laboratories. Those who test positive will have their results confirmed through the University Testing Service.

Does testing negative in the Christmas Travel Test mean I don’t need to take any precautions at home with elderly or vulnerable family?
Two negative tests means that the chance of you being infectious is very low, but not zero. Remember you could also catch the virus just before your second test or in the days afterwards. Please exercise caution, continue to socially distance and discuss with your families.

Getting your results

What happens if I test positive to a Christmas Travel test?
You should take a confirmatory test through the University Testing Service (EAS) to confirm the result. If this is positive, you will have to stay in Oxford and self-isolate for ten days. We will support you if you need to stay in college accommodation.

What happens if I am identified as a close contact (or am in the same household) as someone who has tested positive in the run-up to the Christmas travel window?
You should seek a Christmas Travel Test. If you test negative, you must still self-isolate for 14 days but this can be done at home if you wish to do so, taking into account the risk of transmission to your family. You should only use public transport if you have no other option. You should strictly follow safer travel guidance for passengers. This guidance allowing travel after close contact with a positive test is a time-limited exemption which only applies during the student travel window. Existing Government guidance restricting travel for 14 days after identification as a close contact will
continue to apply to students outside the ‘window’; and to staff and any non-travelling students throughout.

Can I use the results of a Christmas Travel Test as proof that I am negative for the virus when travelling internationally?
The Christmas Travel Test is not designed for international travel and cannot be used for this purpose. COVID-19 entry requirements vary from country to country, so you should contact your airline, travel agent or embassy about testing requirements. If you need to have proof of a negative test for international travel you will need to take a test through a private provider.

Hilary term arrangements

What are the testing plans for Hilary term? Will I take a test when I return?
Plans are now being developed for testing ahead of students’ return in Hilary term, and information will follow in the near future. Lessons from Christmas testing will help to inform our plans for the new year.

Testing case studies

Students at Merton and St Hilda’s colleges have been taking lateral flow tests for several weeks as part of the FACTS research study. Here’s what they have to say about getting tested, as well as their advice for other students about taking tests ahead of the Christmas vacation.

JH, Merton

“The experience was straightforward, quick, and efficient - an easy thing to do between seminars. There are benefits to gain from lateral flow testing for all students, it provides a quick way to obtain a relatively secure record of whether one is positive with COVID-19 or not; moreover, it can be done in mass testing and rapidly as well, which will help everyone get it. It will also allow students to return home more safely to their families.

SS, St Hilda’s

“So far, I have done the test three times, and has come back negative every single time. I was a bit worried that the test would be very uncomfortable to take, but it really wasn’t that bad in reality – I wouldn’t say it was the most pleasant thing I’d ever done but it’s a very quick process. The result of the test is also very clear, as it is just lines on a strip, just like a pregnancy test. Lateral flow testing is very quick, meaning students don’t have to isolate while they wait for results, as they come back in 30 minutes!”

ZA, Merton

“The test itself is really easy and straightforward – even if it does sometimes make you sneeze! I would definitely advise everyone to take a lateral flow test before the Christmas vac – they are quick and easy to do, and even if you did have to spend two weeks self-isolating because of a positive test, this is better than putting your parents into hospital! Our parents are much more vulnerable than most of us, who would likely be fine/asymptomatic if infected – I think it is worth reassuring yourself that you aren’t unwittingly going to make a family member seriously ill.”
Mollie Clark, Merton

“I was initially a little bit nervous, because I am not usually good at this sort of thing. I was self-conscious because everyone else finished their swabbing before I did, and I feared I was doing it wrong! But in fact it was totally fine, and very easy if you follow the instructions (even though I couldn’t see my tonsils in the phone mirror...)! The swabbing is slightly uncomfortable, but really not a problem. Overall, I find it so reassuring getting the test, as well as convenient, and I would highly recommend it to everyone.”

CB, St Hilda’s

“I didn’t have any major concerns about the test result itself, but was interested to see if the quick self-test would be simple to do in practice. I was pleased to find that I had no difficulty with the process at all; it was quick and easy. Getting tested is a bit uncomfortable, but only for a few moments. I hope that lateral flow testing can reach as many students as want it as quickly as possible. Being able to confirm (with reasonable certainty) that people don’t have COVID-19 would allow us to stop having to treat each other as possible transmitters of the virus and hopefully get us significantly closer to removing the variety of obstacles on normal life. If you’re wondering whether to get a test before travelling home over Christmas, I would recommend doing it.”