

## Mobile Testing Units

### Guidance for Regional Coordination Groups and the directing of Mobile Testing Units (MTUs)

#### 1. Purpose and objectives

The Government has built a national infrastructure for COVID-19 testing, with the aim to expand the reach of testing across the UK. Mobile testing is one of a suite of testing capabilities which has been developed.

Mobile testing is an agile capability that allows temporary testing sites to be set up quickly to serve communities on a rolling basis. The Mobile Testing Units (MTU) have been designed as a flexible testing capability that can respond to most situations. There are some situations in which MTUs are not the most appropriate testing capability.

The high-level direction and supply of MTUs sits with the DHSC, with decisions around their daily deployment being made at a London wide level by the MTU Deployment Cell. The MTU Cell directs the movement of MTUs, but with greater input from Directors of Public Health (DPH). While DPHs will have the power to direct MTUs in response to outbreaks, the decision to do so will be taken together with London Covid Response Cell (LCRC), building on the existing model and the learned experience and familiarity with the capability held by MTU Cell.

#### 2. What is a Mobile Testing Unit?

An MTU provides a clinically assured, stand-alone testing capability in the community. It is an adapted standard white van that can be used in a variety of different settings and setups to deliver testing where needed

The MTU comprises a van with pop-up shelters and an integral traffic management system. It can operate at varying scales in order to best serve the community, with a standard capacity of up to 500 tests per day. The number of tests that can be completed in a day depends on the size of the site, the ratio of vehicle to pedestrian subjects, the hours of operation and the distance it has to travel from the host Regional Testing Centre.

A smaller unit, without the need for parking spaces except for the unit, is now being added to the capability.

MTUs use RTS as supply and delivery hubs, moving between the RTS and selected sites in the community. Tests undertaken by the MTUs are returned to Regional Testing Centres and are managed as Pillar 2 tests.

More detail on the operation of an MTU is set out in Annex A.

#### 3. The Mobile Testing Unit National Distribution

Mobile Testing Units will be allocated into three main groups:

- **Regionally Allocated MTUs** – MTUs allocated by Region for routine scheduling by the MTU cell under the auspices of the DsPH

- **Regional Reserve MTUs** – MTUs kept in Reserve by the MTU Cell to meet Local Outbreaks (“next-day-testing”) and to provide immediate Resilience in case of MTU failure (break down etc)
- **Strategic Reserve MTUs** – c30 MTUs, regionally dispersed but scheduled and operated centrally by the DHSC. The Strategic Reserve will meet Nationally Generated Demand and may be deployed in support of Local Outbreaks when requested to provide surge capacity.

The initial deployment of MTUs is being expanded through June and early July. This will result in 16 MTUs in London. (approx. one per two councils by 13<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

#### 4. The Roles and Responsibilities of London MTU Cell

While the ultimate powers to direct an MTU will remain with DHSC, decisions around where to place vehicles and direct their movements will continue to be planned by the London MTU Cell with input from the DsPH. To support the DsPH in the delivering their statutory requirement the MTU Cell will have four primary roles relating to MTU deployment:

The MTU Cell will:

- Work with regional stakeholders to collate testing demand requests and determine where and when an MTU is needed on a routine basis. The MTU Cell will maintain a forecast out to at least 5 days including associated site permissions and access; ensuring this is delivered when the MTU attends at each site.
- Maintain a Reserve of at least 2 MTUs at any time from within the London’s allocation of vehicles.
- Respond to areas of urgent need, informed by LCRC/LA IMTs, under the direction of DsPH. This may draw upon the London Reserve vehicles.
- Identify and agree local sites for MTU use and establish a broad portfolio of sites that can be accessed routinely or in times of urgent need.

Should a crisis or outbreak arise, the DHSC may deploy additional units from the Strategic Reserve to an area on a temporary basis if the Regional Reserve is not enough. These may be requested urgently by the MTU Cell and/or DsPH to provide surge capacity when demand exceeds London capacity.

At all times, the MTU Cell will remain accountable to DsPH.

#### 5. Pre-Planning

Boroughs need to identify a network of sites that cover all areas of the Borough as possible sites for MTU deployment. This work could also review sites suitable for alternate day deployment of MTUs using the following criteria:

Accessible for all – fit with existing outreach services/ JSNA priorities

- Social vulnerability – link to find and treat service
- Hard to reach groups
- Lack of digital access
- Language barriers

- HMOs/overcrowding
- Physical access to testing sites – low car ownership

Meets potential local surge in prevalence

- High demand in local areas
- Communities with outbreaks
- Workplaces
- Population needs and behaviour/ any groups less likely to comply with social distancing

Suitability of site (see appendices 1-3).

For the smaller units you do not need on-site parking, except for the van.

## **6. Mobile Testing Unit deployment for large local outbreaks**

London Coronavirus Response Cell (LCRC) (Incident Management Team) or LA Incident Management Team (IMT) or DPH identifies a situation (either through data or notification from DPH) where an enhanced investigation will be required, e.g.:

- School
- Universities / halls of residence
- Other educational settings
- A complex workplace
- A place of worship, place of mass gathering – once these are allowed

LA/ LCRC identifies a need for testing at scale to manage the situation/outbreak as per Standard Operating Procedures and joint agreement, taking into account the need for rapid testing, difficulties accessing the Regional Testing Site or scheduled MTU deployments in the local area, convenience and accessibility.

If the number of tests required for outbreak management cannot be met through the usual route of LCRC arranging PHE pillar 1 tests AND the scale of the outbreak is such that a local testing site is required, a decision will be taken by the DPH to request a MTU deployment the following day.

### **Operational process:**

- The DPH notifies the mobile testing unit (MTU) cell of the need for an MTU the next day, the number of tests needed, the location for the deployment, and that a list will be provided of the names of those advised to attend.
- LA, working with the school, workplace, or other setting, contacts all people or parents of children requiring testing in writing ideally by email. These people attending the MTU will be provided with a test kit by the MTU.
- LA confirms with mobile testing cell that the site meets the requirements (see DHSC guidance) for a full-scale MTU with vehicular accessor if a smaller MTU deployment is required (e.g. pedestrian only), and provides a list of names.
- LA staff will support on the day to register people who attend but are not on the list of names provided in advance.
- All testing will be as per national testing protocols and results entered onto SGSS and CTAS systems.

## **Prioritisation**

In London, MTU numbers are increasing which will provide additional capacity to allow for DPH requested “next-day-testing” (NDT).

In the event that more than one borough requests urgent MTU deployment for the same day, and the number of reserve MTUs available is not sufficient to provide for these requests, a request can be made to access MTUs from the DHSC national reserve.

If required, there is also the ability to redeploy one or more of the MTUs that are operational in London to meet surge requirements. A decision on which MTUs to redeploy will be taken jointly by the LCRC on-call lead and the MTU DPH on-call lead in consultation with DHSC and military commanders responsible for MTU deployments.

Tasking should be according to the following priorities:

1. Homeless/hostels as this is a mobile population which it may be difficult to find in 24/48hrs time.
2. Community clusters
3. Care homes: residents and staff
4. Schools/ nurseries
5. Workplaces
6. Other

DPH/LCRC/IMT will decide if all those waiting for tests should be asked to self-isolate until tested and the results received.

## Appendix 1

### Mobile Testing Unit Reference Information for host London Local Authorities

#### **Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) and Regional Testing Centre (RTC) test bookings**

**MTU and RTC tests are by appointment only:** Tests will only be conducted for those people who have an appointment booked via the national booking portal. Anyone without an appointment will be asked to book on-line before returning. This should also include any household members travelling if they expect to be tested.

Self-referral and employer referral registration links are on [www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested). The gov.uk page also includes details of who is eligible for tests.

Opening times for all MTU sites are approximately 10.30-15.30. As of 8 June some MTUs are now open until 16.00. Please see confirmation of times available when booking a time slot using the booking portal.

Access to tests at RTCs is for those in vehicles only. Tests at MTUs are available for those in vehicles and for pedestrians. Pedestrian access is technically possible but currently discouraged and registrations require vehicle registration details to be added when booking places.

Cleaning down after each pedestrian subject requires significantly more time and additional PPE to manage the site as well as clear segregation of pedestrian flow from the general public. It is intended to change this policy soon (to provide greater access for pedestrians) and the booking portal will be updated accordingly. We are aware of infection control concerns regarding pedestrians. This policy is set by DHSC and suitable infection control arrangements are in place at MTUs to manage pedestrian access.

#### **Booking portal timings**

A percentage of bookings are released on the employer referral booking system before general release on the self-referral portal. Bookings on the self-referral portal are currently released from 18.00 for bookings the following morning, and on the morning of the deployment for bookings later that day. This is to encourage people to book as soon as possible and to improve the time from someone developing symptoms to receiving their test results.

#### **Employer booking portal**

Key worker employer organisations can register to use the employer referral booking portal (link to register [on this page](#)). The employer referral portal reserves a % of the test booking slots for employers to refer staff before those slots are released to the general eligible public via the self-referral portal.

The employer referral system enables employers to:

- Submit requests for test centre appointment allocations by uploading an excel file (.xls/.xlsx) each day.
- Download submitted requests which have had appointments allocated.
- View the status of your submitted requests each day after 5pm.

Employees will be sent a booking confirmation for their nearest test location with availability directly from the system.

As of 4 June, DHSC has moved the employer referral portal to a “continuous run” state. This means the original 3pm daily submission deadline has been removed. Employers will still upload only one spreadsheet a day, but all uploaded spreadsheets will be processed every 5 minutes between 8am and 6pm.

E.g. if an employer believes they are ready to upload requests at 11am they can upload then and it will be almost instantly processed. But if employers want to hang on past 3pm for any reason until later in the day, they can do so.

DHSC have also simplified the form to avoid errors that prevent employers from uploading successfully. E.g. they no longer ask for the vehicle registration number. DHSC have also added the user guide to the post-login page. All of this work is aimed at creating a more sustainable system.

### **Local Authority support**

The military teams and MTUs are intended to be self-sufficient. They do require access to toilet facilities within proximity of the MTU location. In addition we recommend the following local authority support:

- Minimum of one local authority representative / liaison officer at the MTU during the scheduled hours of operation (10.00 to 16.00 but recommend available on site from 09.00 in case of early arrivals until close).
- Consideration of traffic management around the area of the site.
- Press officer available on-call if required e.g. in the event of media presence, MP or elected member visits to the site.

Some local authorities have also undertaken the following actions you may wish to consider.

- Deployed staff to offer advice to people in traffic queues (e.g. to inform people that no-one can be tested without a valid booking code)
- Deployed staff to provide additional security around the site location where considered useful.
- Provided temporary barriers/fencing to improve security.
- Provided food for the military personnel which has been very well received.

### **Liaison with the military**

The MTU military team commander will usually make contact with the nominated site point of contact on the morning of the first day of the deployment. The assigned team receive the point of contact information as part of their deployment instructions each morning. If you do not hear from them, or from other military liaison officers in advance, we recommend the local authority point of contact for the day introduces themselves to the military team commander when they arrive on site. We recommend arriving on site at 09.00 although the arrival of the military team will vary depending on their travel time.

### **Public communications**

The Cabinet Office and DHSC are working on further public communications advice. An MTU local comms package and FAQs (attached) have been provided. While you can use these documents to inform your comms, please do not share the documents outside your local authority.

When communicating with the public about the MTUs please:

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- include a clear statement that no-one should turn up without an appointment. Those without a confirmed booking will not be able to be tested;
- do not publicise the location of the MTU. If publicising the MTU, only include a statement that it will be deployed in the Borough and full details are or will be available via the self-referral booking portal on gov.uk.

Data on the number of tests undertaken at MTUs (individual locations or collective) should not be released to the media. This data is owned by DHSC and is shared with local authorities for internal use to inform their COVID-19 planning and response activity only.

Further information on local public comms to be confirmed.

### **Protective Security considerations**

Guidance produced by Metropolitan Police Service Protective Security Operations was issued on 1 May 2020. **See Annex A.**

### **Domestic abuse disclosures**

Guidance produced by the City of London Police was issued on 1 May 2020. **See Annex B.**

### **Risk assessment including Personal Protective Equipment for local authority staff**

An example risk assessment has kindly been shared by London Borough of Haringey. You may wish to consider adopting a similar approach. **See Annex C.**

## **Appendix 2**

### **Pre-Planning**

#### **Note to assist Local Authorities to identify sites for alternate day deployment of Mobile testing units**

Boroughs need to identify a network of sites that cover all areas of the Borough as possible sites so that, should larger outbreaks occur where an MTU might be needed, there would be some pre-thought given to where these could go depending on whereabouts in the Borough the issue is occurring. Outbreaks may occur in settings which are themselves large enough to 'host' an MTU such as a large workplace or a secondary school (the school may need to shut for the day to allow deployment) or a larger care home. Please refer to the DHSC Guidance for Regional Coordination Groups and the Directing of Mobile Testing Units appended to this document for detailed guidance on MTU site suitability). Where a deployment is required in a location where there is no available location to meet the full MTU site requirements, a smaller form of MTU can be deployed. However, this will have a more limited capacity / through-put rate than a full scale MTU.

#### **Site selection**

MTUs have been designed with agility in mind so they are able to operate on nearly any site as required. If the testing aim is to deliver the highest throughput and greatest comfort for those running the site, it is strongly recommended that the following features are considered when selecting a site for mobile testing:

- Parking for 30/40+ cars (smaller car parks for smaller communities can be used)
- Ability to implement a one-way traffic system on site
- Separate entry and exit points for pedestrian testing
- Away from buildings in use by other occupants (no dual access)
- Hard standing for drive in capability (preferably flat)
- Site entry height restriction above 2.8m
- Toilet Facilities that are on or near the site (required in all cases for staff use only)

There is no site selection criteria for smaller form MTU deployments at this time. Essentially, an MTU deployment can be consider for anywhere there is access to park a van and accommodate the MTU team (including toilet facilities nearby). Smaller sites may prohibit vehicular access meaning testing is available for pedestrians only. This will limit the daily testing capacity.