



## Gov't-backed COVID testing firm under investigation for planning to sell UK resident's DNA

### Description

A U.K. government-approved COVID-19 PCR testing firm is under investigation after their plans to sell customer DNA taken from their swabs came to light.

This past weekend The Sunday Times [reported](#) that one of the largest government-approved COVID-19 testing providers in the U.K., Cignpost Diagnostics, is under investigation by the government's Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) data privacy watchdog, after the ICO became aware that the company stated they intend to analyze and/or sell client DNA samples obtained from their polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests.

The company, which is approved by the U.K. government as a PCR provider and has provided more than 3 million tests since its founding in June, had announced its plans to sell sensitive medical data to third party researchers in order to “learn more about human health.”

According to the [Daily Mail](#), the company, which trades under the name ExpressTest, was not upfront with customers that swabs of their DNA could be sold to “collaborators” including universities and private companies, for medical research.

Instead, customers were asked to agree to a privacy policy which merely linked to another document outlining the firm's so-called “research programme.”

Further, Cignpost states that besides sharing DNA samples, the firm also retains the “biological samples” and “genetic information” of people who took their tests, which were offered widely at Gatwick, Heathrow, Birmingham, and Edinburgh airports, at a lower cost than most competitors.

It is not yet clear if any swabs have already been sold by Cignpost Diagnostics.

In a statement issued to the [Daily Mail](#), IOC Deputy Commissioner Steve Wood said, “There is no personal data more sensitive than our DNA. People should be told about what’s happening to it in a clear, open and honest way so they can make informed decisions about whether they want to give it up.”

“Testing is a key tool to help people go back out and enjoy life as we emerge from the pandemic. For it to succeed, people must have trust and confidence in how their personal data is used,” Wood added. “That means testing schemes must be fair and transparent and we’ve worked with organisations throughout the pandemic to ensure people’s privacy is considered from the outset.”

According to the [Daily Mail](#), Cignpost Diagnostics was approved to be added to a coalition of COVID test providers by the Laboratory and Testing Industry Organization (LTIO), who had promised the public they were creating a “trustworthy” list of companies Britons could turn to for timely and affordable swabs.

The installation of the LTIO arose shortly after the U.K. government announced they were cracking down on the “Wild West” PCR test market, following ministers’ claims that the testing companies were “acting like cowboys” by employing misleading advertisements on government websites. [Read Full Article >](#)

**Date Created**

11/26/2021