

Government drives forward its 150-day clinical trial target

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NHS patients get faster access to groundbreaking treatments as government drives forward 150-day clinical trial target

- Average set up time for commercial clinical trials in UK reduced to 122 days, down from 169 last year, meaning faster access to new treatments on the NHS
- Significant reduction in set-up times marks progress on Prime Minister's commitment to get UK clinical trials up and running within 150 days by March 2026
- Target hit after red tape and unnecessary paperwork was slashed for researchers

NHS patients will be able to access life-changing new treatments faster than ever before, as new figures published today show the government is on track to hit ambitious clinical trial targets.

The latest UK Clinical Research Delivery key performance indicators show the average time to set up a commercial interventional clinical trial has fallen from 169 days to 122 days when comparing the same six month period this year to last.

The milestone has been backed by a combined £137million investment in health research reforms—dismantling years of unnecessary bureaucracy, standardising processes across the system, and investing directly in research infrastructure across the UK.

Dr Zubir Ahmed, Health Innovation and Safety Minister, said:

The UK has always had world-class science and outstanding NHS clinicians. Today's figures show we are now matching that excellence with a system that slashes red tape to get trials up and running at the speed patients deserve.

Behind every clinical trial is a person — someone living with a serious illness, waiting for a treatment that could change their life. Getting that treatment to them sooner is real hope arriving sooner for patients and their families.

Today's progress is something to be proud of — but we know we can go further and we intend to. This is exactly what our 10 Year Health Plan looks like in practice: a government that sets ambitious targets, backs them with real investment, and delivers. We are not stopping here — 150 days is a milestone, not a finish line, and we remain committed to reducing this further.

Faster trial set-up means NHS patients can access new medicines, vaccines and treatments sooner — without waiting years while administrative processes catch up with the science.

Trials that once took nearly a year to get off the ground are now up and running in a matter of months, meaning patients in communities across the country have earlier access to potentially life-changing treatments that were previously out of reach.

The real-world impact is already clear. A major international study into COPD — a lung condition

that makes it hard to breathe — took its first patients in just 81 days. That's roughly half the time it used to take to successfully open a trial. A specialist NHS team in Bradford made it happen by cutting through the red tape. A trial testing a new cancer treatment for people with advanced bowel cancer was up and running in just 70 days. A UK patient was the first person in the whole of Europe to receive that treatment.

The £42 million landmark TRANSFORM prostate cancer screening trial — co-funded by Prostate Cancer UK and the NIHR, and the most ambitious of its kind in decades — moved from regulatory submission to consenting its first participant in under 150 days, showing that faster set-up is benefiting the full breadth of UK clinical research.

The UK is also securing more global and European first patient enrolments than ever before — meaning more UK patients are among the first in the world to benefit from cutting-edge treatments. Since April 2025, the UK has reported 29 global firsts and 54 European firsts for 2025/26.

Since April 2025, the government has driven a sustained, funded programme of action to hit the target.

DHSC led a UK-wide Study Set-Up Plan on behalf of all four nations, including standardising and mandating commercial contracting processes across the system.

Regulatory reviews now typically complete in under 60 days, with 99% of studies receiving regulatory approval within target timelines.

Over £137 million has been spent on research infrastructure and reforms, including £45 million in Research Capability Funding supporting eligible NHS organisations to build trial set-up capacity.

And more than £92.5 million has supported the launch of 35 Commercial Research Delivery Centres across the UK.

NIHR Chief Executive and Chief Scientific Advisor at DHSC, Professor Lucy Chappell, said:

Reaching this milestone shows what is possible when the whole system works together to prioritise research - particularly commercial clinical research. By reducing unnecessary delays and strengthening delivery across the NHS, we are enabling patients to access innovative treatments far more quickly, and bringing research closer to everyday care.

The NIHR has been central to driving this progress across the system. Maintaining this momentum will be key to ensuring the UK remains a global leader in clinical research and a destination of choice for life sciences investment.

An increased portion of NIHR research funding is now tied to performance. From April 2026, a portion of NIHR funding is linked to national delivery targets, meaning research centres are directly rewarded for results.

Research has also been formally embedded in NHS Medium Term Planning Framework, making it a core part of everyday care rather than an optional extra.

The NIHR Industry Hub, launched in October 2025, now acts as the single front door for companies running trials in England, coordinating research infrastructure into one coherent offer.

A target of 14-day initial MHRA review for early-phase trials is being pursued, which would place the UK among the fastest regulatory environments in the world.

MHRA Chief Executive Lawrence Tallon said:

This is a timely moment to reflect on the impressive gains and considerable growth that our reforms have already delivered particularly in early and innovative research.

There has been a marked increase in clinical trial applications, and we are consistently meeting or exceeding targets for combined review.

We're already seeing greater confidence from industry that the UK is the best place to run clinical trials. The new regulations coming into force this month solidify our commitment to accelerating research and earlier access for patients to ground-breaking medicines.

Matt Westmore, Chief Executive at the Health Research Authority, said:

Reaching the 150-day milestone is an important step forward, but it isn't our end point. It shows what's possible when the whole health and care research system pulls in the same direction with focus and clarity.

By continuing to simplify and streamline the regulation, approval, set-up and delivery of all research, we truly can make the UK the easiest place in the world to do research that people can trust.

Global sponsors consistently highlight the UK's strengths: high-quality science, a responsive regulatory environment, access to the NHS as a unified research platform, and increasingly coordinated national delivery.

The UK's growing share of global and European first patient enrolments reflect that in practice.

Richard Torbett, Chief Executive of the ABPI said:

Today's announcement marks an important milestone. The improvement demonstrates what can be achieved through a concerted approach by the clinical research ecosystem. The £300 million injection of funds by industry through the VPAG Investment Programme has helped catalyse this change.

For the UK to compete effectively and fulfil its potential as a global life sciences leader, it is crucial to maintain momentum in driving down trial set-up times. Alongside this, we need to see a substantial increase in the numbers of patients recruited into industry trials.

We appreciate the collective effort and ongoing government commitment involved in reaching this point. Our industry will continue working in close partnership with the system to deliver trials at pace, enabling more UK patients to benefit from the latest medicines in development.

Today's milestone is part of a wider life sciences success story for the UK.

The Health Research Data Service, launching this year, will give researchers secure, streamlined access to NHS patient data at scale — accelerating drug discovery and trial design.

The recently finalised UK-US pharmaceutical partnership delivers tangible benefits for patients, secures improved access to innovative medicines developed on both sides of the Atlantic. And the updated NICE cost-effectiveness thresholds are already unlocking a new pipeline of treatments for cancer.

The UK is not just one of the fastest places to run a clinical trial — it is also one of the best to develop, approve, and deliver the medicines of the future.

Lord O'Shaughnessy, Author of the 2023 Review of Commercial Clinical Trials in the UK, said:

The significant improvement in clinical trial set up times shows the UK has turned a corner in research performance.

Coupled with the quicker and more flexible approach taken by the MHRA, this puts the NHS back in the shop window to attract commercial trials from global pharma and biotech companies.

We still need to see this play through growth in the number of participants taking part in commercial research, but these improvements put us in a much better position to bring more new trials into the UK.

Dan Bamford, Director of Clinical Trials and Partnerships, Moderna said:

This milestone reflects what is possible when government, the NHS, NIHR and industry work in true partnership. Through our strategic collaboration with the UK, Moderna has helped to co-develop a faster, more coordinated clinical trials ecosystem—one that is now delivering at pace and scale. Achieving the 150-day benchmark is not just a metric; it signals a step-change in predictability, performance and patient access to research-enhanced care confirming the UK as a globally competitive and trusted partner for clinical development.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-drives-forward-its-150-day-clinical-trial-target>