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Guidance

# NHS test and trace: workplace guidance

Guidance on the NHS test and trace service for employers, businesses and workers.

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The NHS test and trace service forms a central part of the government's coronavirus (COVID-19) recovery strategy, which seeks to help the nation return to normal as soon as possible for as many people as possible, in a way that is safe and protects the NHS and social care sector.

Once launched, this service will also play a vital role in providing an early warning if COVID-19 activity is increasing locally, regionally or nationally. This information will then be used to inform the government's approach to stop the spread of the virus.

This guidance explains how employers and businesses can play their part in the NHS test and trace programme to slow the spread of the virus, protect the health and care system and save lives.

This guidance should be used in conjunction with Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

By following the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) guidance, employers can reduce the risk of co-workers having to self-isolate if a member of staff tests positive for COVID-19.

This guidance is for England only. There are equivalent arrangements for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## About the NHS test and trace service

The NHS test and trace service:

- provides testing for anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus to find out if they have the virus
- gets in touch with anyone who has had a positive test result to help them share information about any close recent contacts they have had
- alerts those contacts, where necessary, and notifies them they need to self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus

By following instructions to self-isolate, people who have had close recent contact with someone with coronavirus will be protecting their family, friends, colleagues and other people around them, and will play a direct role in stopping the spread of the virus.

## Guidance for employers

### The role of employers

The NHS test and trace service will help to manage the risk of the virus re-emerging as restrictions on everyday life are eased, as far as it is deemed safe to do so.

It is vital that employers play their part by:

- making their workplaces as safe as possible
- encouraging workers to heed any notifications to self-isolate and supporting them when in isolation

Although this may seem disruptive for businesses, it is less disruptive than an outbreak of COVID-19 in the workplace will be, and far less disruptive than periods in lockdown.

The NHS test and trace service is designed to support businesses and economic recovery by:

- providing testing for anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus, so that if they have been tested positive, they and their household member know to continue to self-isolate
- helping to stop the onward spread of the virus in the workplace and wider society, so that fewer people develop coronavirus and have to self-isolate
- enabling the government to go further in safely easing or lifting lockdown measures, as far as it is deemed safe to do so, thereby allowing the nation to return to normal as quickly as possible

To facilitate the NHS test and trace service, employers should encourage workers to heed any notifications to self-isolate and provide support to these individuals when in isolation.

It is important the employers continue to protect the health and safety both of their workers and of other people who may be affected by their business, for example agency workers, contractors, volunteers, customers, suppliers and other visitors.

To help employers, guidance has been developed on the 5 steps for working safely (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/5-steps-to-working-safely>), along with sector-specific guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

It is important to follow this guidance to help to reduce the risk of a spread of infection in the workplace.

Employers must continue to follow health and safety workplace guidance for their sector such as:

- making every reasonable effort to enable working from home as a first option
- where working from home isn't possible, identifying sensible measures to control the risks in the workplace
- keeping the workplace clean, maintaining safe working separation, and preventing transmission through unnecessary touching of potentially contaminated surfaces

The measures employers put in place to maintain social distancing will depend on their individual business circumstances, including their working environment, the size of the site and the number of workers. The guidance will support employers to make an informed decision.

The NHS test and trace service does not change the existing guidance about working from home wherever possible.

Read further in-depth guidance on making sure your workplace is safe for your workers and others affected by your business (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

## **Workplace risk**

COVID-19 is a new risk that must be incorporated into workplace risk assessments. Employers must therefore carry out a new COVID-19 risk assessment if they have not already done so.

The Health and Safety Executive has published guidance to help you conduct a risk assessment (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm>).

Employers have a duty to consult their workers, and unions where applicable, as part of their risk assessment. Involving workers in this will help build trust and confidence that all reasonably practicable steps are being taken to reduce risks of COVID-19, so that people can return to work safely. Employers should share the risk assessment with workers and consider publishing the risk assessment on their website.

The NHS test and trace service supplements the risk mitigation measures taken by employers by identifying people who have had close recent contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus and advising them to self-isolate. This will reduce the risk of a rise in infections among the general population.

## **Supporting employers with a workplace outbreak**

If multiple cases of coronavirus appear in a workplace, an outbreak control team from either the local authority or Public Health England will, if necessary, be assigned to help the employer manage the outbreak. Employers should seek advice from their local authority in the first instance.

## **Supporting workers who need to self-isolate**

Employers should support workers who need to self-isolate and must not ask them to attend the workplace.

Workers will be told to isolate because they:

- have coronavirus symptoms and are awaiting a test result
- have tested positive for coronavirus
- are a member of the same household as someone who has symptoms or has tested positive for coronavirus
- have been in close recent contact with someone who has tested positive and received a notification to self-isolate from NHS test and trace.

Employers should continue to communicate with workers in self-isolation and provide support. This includes allowing people to work from home if they remain well and if it is practicable to do so. This might include finding alternative work that can be completed at home during the period of self-isolation.

If people can't work from home, employers must ensure any self-isolating employee is receiving sick pay and give them the option to use their paid leave days if they prefer. Further guidance is available on what employees should do if they cannot work.

Employees in self-isolation are entitled to Statutory Sick Pay for every day they are in isolation, as long as they meet the eligibility conditions.

Information for employers on reclaiming Statutory Sick Pay (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-back-statutory-sick-pay-paid-to-your-employees-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>).

The NHS test and trace service will provide a notification that can be used as evidence that someone has been told to self-isolate.

An employee can ask to take their paid holiday for the time they're off work, entitling them to full pay for the duration of their leave, as opposed to Statutory Sick Pay, if they choose.

## Guidance for self-employed people

If you are self-employed, you must continue to work from home if you can. If this is not possible, the guidance on the 5 steps for working safely and sector-specific advice (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) must be implemented for your work environment. As part of this, you must continue to think about how you can observe government guidance on social distancing for the people that you meet, such as customers and suppliers.

To help stop the spread of coronavirus, you will be told to self-isolate if you or another household member develop symptoms or test positive for coronavirus, or if the NHS test and trace service tells you to do so because you have had close recent contact with someone with coronavirus. If it is possible for you to amend your working practices and work from home, then you must do so.

If your business has been adversely affected by coronavirus, you may be eligible for a grant through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. More information on this scheme, and other support available if you are not eligible, is on GOV.UK (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme>).

## Contact tracing: contact with co-workers

The NHS test and trace service will follow up with people who need to self-isolate because they have had close recent contact with someone, who might be a colleague, who has tested positive for coronavirus. It will do this through:

- dedicated contact tracing staff
- local public health experts
- online services
- the new NHS COVID-19 app, which will be rolled out nationally after the trial period in the Isle of Wight

When someone first develops symptoms and orders a test, they will be encouraged to alert the people that they have had close contact with in the 48 hours before symptom onset. If any of those close contacts are co-workers, the person who has developed symptoms may wish to (but is not obliged to) ask their employer to alert those co-workers. At this stage, those close contacts should not self-isolate, but they:

- must avoid individuals who are at high-risk of contracting COVID-19, for example, because they have pre-existing medical conditions, such as respiratory issues
- must take extra care in practising social distancing and good hygiene and in watching out for symptoms
- will be better prepared if the person who has symptoms has a positive test result and if they (the contact) receive a notification from the NHS test and trace service explaining they need to self-isolate

If the person who has symptoms has a positive test result for COVID-19, the NHS test and trace service will ask them to share information about their close recent contacts.

If they work in – or have recently visited or attended – one of the following settings, the contact tracing process will be escalated to local public health experts, who will liaise as necessary with the manager of the relevant setting:

- a health or care setting, for instance a hospital or care home
- a prison or other secure establishment
- a school for children with special needs
- any setting where there is a risk of a local outbreak

In other cases, any non-household contacts who need to self-isolate will be contacted by the NHS test and trace service. They will receive a formal notification (either a phone call, letter, email or text message) setting out how long they need to self-isolate for.

Workers can use this notification to inform their employer that they have been told to self-isolate. Employers will need this evidence if they are going to claim a rebate for Statutory Sick Pay.

The period of self-isolation will be for 14 days from the point of most recent contact with the person who has tested positive for coronavirus.

## The NHS COVID-19 app

The NHS COVID-19 app will form one component of the NHS test and trace service. It will complement other forms of contact tracing, helping to speed up contact tracing and to reach people who cannot be reached through traditional forms of contact tracing, such as someone you do not know but you have sat next to on public transport.

The app is currently being trialled in the Isle of Wight before a national rollout.

For further information on the app please check the NHS COVID-19 App website (<https://www.nhs.uk/covid-19-response/nhs-covid-19-app/>).

## Guidance for workers

### Self-isolation

Workers who are self-isolating because they have symptoms of coronavirus or live with someone who has symptoms of coronavirus, can get an isolation note through NHS111 online.

Workers who are told to self-isolate should share the evidence provided by NHS test and trace to show that they have been told to self-isolate and explain to their employer that this means that they cannot come to work.

Workers who are already unable to work and have a 'fit note' which says they are not fit for work covering the period for which they have been told to self-isolate, must follow the public health advice they have been given.

Workers must self-isolate whenever they receive a notification from the NHS test and trace service asking them to do so. If this happens on multiple occasions, they should consider how you can better follow social distancing requirements.

Workers who think the contacts that have triggered these notifications are workplace contacts, should ask their employer to consider what further mitigating actions could be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19, such as using screens to separate people or 'cohorting' to reduce the number of people each person has contact with.

See further suggestions in the safer workplaces guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

## Sources of financial help

An employee who is self-isolating who can work from home must do so, by agreement with their employer. If it is not possible for them to work, employees can get Statutory Sick Pay. This is paid at a flat rate of £95.85 per week by employers for up to 28 weeks per period of sickness.

Some employers choose to offer more than the statutory minimum and provide more financial support to their employees while they are off work sick – either in terms of the rate of pay or the duration. This is known as 'contractual' or 'occupational' sick pay.

When an individual's entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay ends, depending on their individual circumstances they may be able to claim Universal Credit and/or Employment and Support Allowance.

Agency workers or workers on zero hours contract who have been told to self-isolate must work from home, unless it is impossible for them to do so. If they are unable to work from home, they may be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay or Universal Credit while self-isolating in line with government guidance.

Statutory Sick Pay guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay>)

Further information on guidance and support for employees during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-and-support-for-employees-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

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