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Guidance

NHS Test and Trace in the workplace

Guidance on what to do if you or someone you employ is contacted by NHS Test and Trace, including self-isolation and financial support.

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From:
Department of Health and Social Care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care>)

Applies to:
England

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A new national lockdown came into force across England on Wednesday 6 January. You must stay at home. The single most important action we can all take is to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives. Read more about what you can and cannot do during the national lockdown (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>).

NHS Test and Trace:

- 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.

See further information on how NHS Test and Trace works (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>).

This guidance explains how employers and businesses can support NHS Test and Trace and play their part to slow the spread of the virus, protect the health and care system and save lives.

The NHS COVID-19 app is an important part of NHS Test and Trace and enhances the contact tracing process by enabling users with a compatible smartphone to check symptoms, order tests and receive results and advice. The app will also provide alerts to self-isolate if a user has been in close contact of a confirmed case. This will help to break chains of transmission, keep people safe, and avoid the need for further societal and economic restrictions.

- see how businesses should use the app and NHS QR code poster
- see how workers should use the app
- download the app (<https://covid19.nhs.uk/>)

Guidance for employers

It's critical that employers take steps to keep workers and visitors safe. By following the sector-specific guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>), employers can reduce the risk of co-workers having to self-isolate if a member of staff tests positive for COVID-19.

Working from home, where possible, is essential to limiting contacts between households. It's recommended that people continue to work from home, unless it's not reasonably possible to do so.

If you need to leave your home to carry out your usual work duties you can do so. If necessary, you can also travel for work purposes and stay away from home.

It is vital that employers play their part by:

- making their workplaces as safe as possible (where working from home is not possible)
- supporting their workers when in self-isolation

It is a legal requirement for employers to not knowingly allow an employee who has been told to self-isolate to come into work or work anywhere other than their own home for the duration of their self-isolation period. Failure to do so could result in a fine starting from £1,000.

NHS Test and Trace will support businesses and economic recovery by:

- providing free testing (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>) for anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus
- asking those that test positive and their close contacts to self-isolate to stop the spread of the virus in the workplace
- enabling the government to safely lift lockdown measures

Employers (and the self-employed) must continue to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees. They also have similar obligations in respect of other people, for example agency workers, contractors, volunteers, customers, suppliers and other visitors.

Workplace risk

Employers must review risk assessments to ensure they remain suitable and sufficient. Where COVID-19 is a risk in the workplace, it must form part of the risk assessment.

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.

If a worker develops symptoms and orders a test

If a worker develops symptoms, they should request a free test (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>) as soon as their symptoms start.

Once they have ordered the test, they'll be asked by NHS Test and Trace to provide details of anyone who they have been in close recent contact with. This will not automatically be all their co-workers, but anyone who meets the definition of a close contact.

A close contact is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 with a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#tests-for-covid-19>). You can be a contact anytime from 2 days before the person who tested positive developed their symptoms, and up to 10 days after, as this is when they can pass the infection on to others.

A close contact can be:

- anyone who lives in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms or who has tested positive for COVID-19
- anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 with a PCR test:
 - face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a face-to-face conversation within one metre
 - been within one metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact

- sexual contacts
- been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day)
- travelled in the same vehicle or a plane

An interaction through a Perspex (or equivalent) screen with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 is not usually considered to be a close contact, as long as there has been no other contact such as those in the list above.

The contact tracers will not consider the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) as a mitigation when assessing whether a recent contact is likely to have risked transmitting the virus. Only full medical-grade PPE worn in health and care settings will be considered.

Medical-grade PPE should not be purchased to circumvent self-isolation, as this risks disrupting critical supplies needed by the NHS and social care sector.

Alerting close contacts

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 should consider asking their employer to alert those co-workers.

Close contacts at this stage do not need to self-isolate unless requested to do so by NHS Test and Trace or a public health professional, but they should:

- avoid contact with people at high increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus, such as people with pre-existing medical conditions
- take extra care in practising social distancing and good hygiene
- watch out for symptoms and self-isolate if they also show signs of coronavirus

Employers may need to keep staff informed about COVID-19 cases among their colleagues. However, employers should not name the individual. If a co-worker is at risk because of close contact with the positive case, then they will be notified to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. Employers should make sure their workplaces are safe by regular cleaning and by encouraging good hygiene practice.

If the test is positive

If the person with symptoms tests positive for COVID-19, NHS Test and Trace will notify their close contacts and instruct them to self-isolate.

This will occur by either a phone call, text message, email or letter. The period of self-isolation will be for 10 days from the point of most recent contact with the person who has tested positive for coronavirus. It is important for all contacts to self-isolate in this way because even if they do not experience symptoms, they could still be infectious to others.

When NHS Test and Trace advises contacts to self-isolate, it does not tell them the identity of the person who has tested positive.

When a case would be escalated to local public health experts

Contact tracing will be taken over by local public health experts where the person who has a positive test result works in or has recently visited:

- a health or care setting, for example a hospital, GP surgery or care home
- a prison or other secure establishment
- a school for children with special needs
- any setting where there's a risk of a local outbreak

Make sure your workers self-isolate

You should help your employees self-isolate if they have coronavirus symptoms and are waiting for a test result, or if they are a member of the same household as someone who has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19.

You have a legal requirement to ensure your employees self-isolate if they:

- have 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

You should not share the identity of a worker who has tested positive with other workers.

Where workers are asked to self-isolate because they are a close contact of a positive case

If a worker is asked by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate, you have a legal duty to not knowingly allow them to come into work, or encourage them to work anywhere other than their place of self-isolation.

If a worker is asked by NHS Test and Trace to self-isolate, you should:

- continue to communicate with them and provide support
- allow them to work from home if they remain well and it is practicable to do so, for example, by finding alternative work that can be completed at home

If a worker cannot work from home, you:

- must ensure they receive Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) provided they meet the eligibility criteria
- may consider giving them the option to use their paid leave days if they prefer

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

You may be able to reclaim SSP (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-back-statutory-sick-pay-paid-to-your-employees-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>). NHS Test and Trace will provide evidence to your worker that they have been told to self-isolate. You should ask them to follow the instructions on getting an isolation note (<https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>) if you require evidence. You may need this evidence to reclaim SSP.

If contacted by NHS Test and Trace, your worker will need to self-isolate for 10 days from when they last came into contact with the positive case. They will not be able to leave self-isolation early even if they are not symptomatic.

They should not take a test if they are not symptomatic as this could generate a false negative and they may then go on to develop symptoms in the following days.

When to contact your local health protection team

See individual business action cards (<https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/reporting-an-outbreak/resources/>) for further information on when you should contact your local health protection team.

Find your local health protection team (<https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>).

The health protection team will:

- undertake a risk assessment
- provide public health advice
- where necessary, establish a multi-agency incident management team to manage the outbreak

Collecting customer and visitor data for NHS Test and Trace

It's now mandatory that organisations in designated sectors that are allowed to remain open:

- ask at least one member of every party of customers or visitors (up to 6 people) to provide their name and contact details if they have not scanned the official NHS QR code
- keep a record of all staff working on their premises and shift times on a given day and their contact details
- keep these records of customers, visitors and staff for 21 days and provide data to NHS Test and Trace if requested
- display an official NHS QR code poster (<https://www.gov.uk/create-coronavirus-qr-poster>), so that customers and visitors can 'check in' using this option as an alternative to providing their contact details
- adhere to General Data Protection Regulations

In addition, the hospitality sector is required to ensure that anyone visiting pubs, restaurants and other venues provides their contact information or checks in using the official NHS QR code before being allowed entry to the venue.

Any designated venue that is found not to be compliant with these regulations will be subject to financial penalties. It is vital that relevant venues comply with these regulations to help keep people safe, and to keep businesses open.

Designated venues will need to keep records of customers, visitors and staff for a period of 21 days and make them available when requested by NHS Test and Trace or local public health officials to help contain clusters or outbreaks.

NHS COVID-19 app and QR code poster

Designated venues must display an official NHS QR code poster to enable customers and visitors to scan the NHS QR code when they arrive by using the NHS COVID-19 app. The information stays on the user's phone. As you are likely to already have a record of your employees and staff, they do not need to scan the NHS QR code. However, staff can scan the QR code, in addition, if they wish.

Find out more about these requirements (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace>).

Employers should facilitate and support employee use of the app within their workplaces wherever possible, while recognising that the app is not mandatory.

Businesses and venues that are not currently expected to maintain staff, customer and visitor logs are encouraged to display official NHS QR code posters if they have indoor areas where individuals are likely to congregate or sit-down in close contact. By displaying an official NHS QR code poster and encouraging people to use the NHS COVID-19 app, businesses will be helping to protect their customers, staff and themselves from the impact of the virus.

Official NHS QR posters can be generated online (<https://www.gov.uk/create-coronavirus-qr-poster>). Organisations can find out more about NHS QR codes and how to generate them on the NHS COVID-19 app website (<https://covid19.nhs.uk/venue-check-in.html>).

Guidance for workers

Working from home, where possible, is essential to limiting contacts between households. It's recommended that people continue to work from home, unless it's not reasonably possible to do so.

If you need to leave your home to carry out your usual work duties you can do so. If necessary, you can also travel for work purposes and stay away from home.

NHS Test and Trace will contact you if you've had close recent contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus.

If you're told to self-isolate you must stay at home

If you're told to self-isolate you have a legal duty to inform your employers that you have been instructed to self-isolate, as soon as possible before you are next due to work. Failure to do so could result in a £50 fine.

If you're told to self-isolate you should:

- request an isolation note from the NHS (<https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>)
- share the evidence provided by NHS Test and Trace with your employer

If you develop symptoms while you're self-isolating, then you must be tested as soon as possible. Request a free test (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>).

Do not order a test if you do not have symptoms. A negative test does not mean that you can stop self-isolating as you will still be in the incubation period, and you could go on to develop COVID-19 in the following days.

If you're already unable to work and have a fit note

If you have a 'fit note' due to an existing illness covering the period you've been told to self-isolate, you must follow the public health advice that you've been given.

If workplace contacts may have infected you

If you think you've been infected by your workplace colleagues, you should ask your employer to consider what they could do to reduce the risk of COVID-19. This could include:

- other ways of working safely during COVID-19 (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>)
- 'cohorting' to reduce the number of people each person has contact with
- using screens or other protective interfaces to separate people or manage workplace risk

Getting financial help if you're asked to self-isolate

If you can continue to work while remaining at home then you must do so, by agreement with your employer.

If it's not possible for you to work, you can get **SSP**, as long as you meet the eligibility criteria.

Some employers choose to offer more than the statutory minimum and provide more financial support to their workers while they're off work. This is known as 'contractual' or 'occupational' sick pay.

If you're no longer able to claim **SSP** you may be able to claim Universal Credit and/or Employment and Support Allowance.

Further guidance is available on what to do if you're employed and cannot work (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-what-to-do-if-youre-employed-and-cannot-work>).

Using the NHS COVID-19 app

Once you've downloaded the app, it should be left on as much as possible. However, there are some specific workplace scenarios when you should pause the contact tracing feature. These are:

- when you are working behind a Perspex (or equivalent) screen
- if you are putting your phone in storage, such as in a work locker, and it will not be on your person
- if you are a health or care worker practising infection prevention and control (IPC) working in a clinical setting

Contact tracing can be paused within the app by moving the contact tracing toggle on the home screen. It's important you turn the contact tracing toggle back on as soon as you are not in one of the above scenarios, for example, when you retrieve your phone from your locker. To make it easier to remember to do this, you will be given the option to pause the feature for different time periods and you will then receive a reminder to turn the contact tracing feature back on.

Guidance for self-employed people

If you're self-employed, you must continue to work from home if you can. If you cannot, you should follow the sector-specific advice (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

Working from home, where possible, is essential to limiting contacts between households. It's recommended that people continue to work from home, unless it's not reasonably possible to do so.

If you need to leave your home to carry out your usual work duties you can do so. If necessary, you can also travel for work purposes and stay away from home.

When you must self-isolate

To help stop the spread of the disease, you'll need to self-isolate if:

- you or another household member develop symptoms
- you test positive for coronavirus
- NHS Test and Trace tells you to because you've had close recent contact with someone with coronavirus

Anyone with coronavirus symptoms can get a free test (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/ask-for-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>). You should get tested as soon as you develop symptoms.

If your business has been affected by coronavirus, you may be eligible for a grant through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme>).

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Last updated 2 February 2021 - hide all updates

1. 2 February 2021

Updated section on when to contact your local health protection team.

2. 11 January 2021

Updated to reflect the change from tiers to national lockdown and to update the definition of a close contact.

3. 15 December 2020

Updated to reflect the change in the self-isolation period from 14 to 10 days.

4. 2 December 2020

Updated to reflect the end of the national restrictions on 2 December 2020 and the reintroduction of the tiered system.

5. 5 November 2020

Updated to show that everyone should work from home where possible during the increased national restrictions from 5 November 2020.

6. 26 October 2020

Updated to reflect employers' legal duties around staff who are self-isolating.

7. 30 September 2020

Corrected an error implying that the NHS COVID-19 app is mandatory, which it isn't.

8. 29 September 2020

Updated to reflect the launch of the COVID-19 app and how it should be used in the workplace. Corrected the period that people are infectious to say: from 2 days before the person was symptomatic up to 10 days from onset of symptoms.

9. 18 September 2020

Updated to reflect the new legal requirements for designated venues to collect contact details and display official NHS QR code posters.

10. 22 July 2020

The guidance has been redrafted for clarity. In addition, there is a new section on collecting customer and visitor data for NHS Test and Trace. The following information has been added to the section headed 'If a worker develops symptoms and orders a test': Where an interaction between 2 people has taken place through a Perspex (or equivalent) screen, this would not be considered sufficient contact. Contact tracers will not consider the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) as a mitigation when assessing whether a recent contact is likely to have risked transmitting the virus.

11. 15 June 2020

Updated the guidance for employers about multiple coronavirus outbreaks in the workplace.

12. 27 May 2020




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Related content

- [NHS Test and Trace: how it works \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works)
- [Guidance for contacts of people with confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection who do not live with the person \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person)
- [COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance)
- [Maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors to support NHS Test and Trace \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance)

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- Testing for coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/testing>)
- Working safely during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/working-safely>)