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Guidance

NHS Test and Trace service in the workplace

Guidance on the NHS Test and Trace service for employers, businesses and workers.

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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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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.

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

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

This guidance is for England only.

Guidance for employers

It is critical that employers take steps to keep workers and visitors safe. By following 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>), employers can reduce the risk of co-workers having to self-isolate if a member of staff tests positive for COVID-19.

The NHS Test and Trace service does not change existing guidance that employees should work from home wherever possible.

It is vital that employers play their part by:

- making their workplaces as safe as possible (where working from home is not possible)
- requesting that workers self-isolate if they have been asked to do so
- supporting their workers when in isolation

Although this may seem disruptive for businesses, it is less disruptive than an outbreak of COVID-19 in the workplace, and far less disruptive than further social and economic restrictions.

The NHS Test and Trace service 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 go further in safely lifting 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

COVID-19 is a new 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 the NHS Test and Trace service 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 anytime from 2 days before the person was symptomatic up to 7 days from onset of symptoms (this is when they are infectious to others). This could be a person who:

- spends significant time in the same household
- is a sexual partner
- has had face-to-face contact (within one metre), including:
 - being coughed on
 - having skin-to-skin physical contact, or
 - contact within one metre for one minute
- has been within 2 metres of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes
- has travelled in a small vehicle, or in a large vehicle or plane

Where an interaction between 2 people has taken place through a Perspex (or equivalent) screen, this would not be considered sufficient contact, provided that there has been no other contact such as any of those indicated 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 the NHS Test and Trace service. 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, the NHS Test and Trace service 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 up to 14 days, from the point of most recent contact with the person who has tested positive for coronavirus. When Test and Trace advises contacts to self-isolate, the service 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
- 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

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 the NHS Test and Trace service to self-isolate, you should:

- not ask them to come into work and tell them to stay at home for their period of self-isolation
- 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>). The NHS Test and Trace service 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 isolate for the full 14 days from when they came into contact with the positive case. They will not be able to leave self-isolation early even if they are not symptomatic as it can take up to 14 days to develop symptoms.

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.

Multiple cases in the workplace

If there is more than one case of COVID-19 in a workplace, employers should contact their local health protection team to report the suspected outbreak.

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

Continued opening up of the economy and public services is reliant on NHS Test and Trace being used to minimise transmission of the virus. In order to ensure that businesses and local services are able to remain open, we will be mandating that organisations in designated sectors must:

- ask at least one member of every party of customers or visitors (up to 6 people) to provide their name and contact details
- 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 from 24 September 2020, 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 will be 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.

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

Guidance for workers

The NHS Test and Trace service 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 should:

- explain to your employer that you cannot come to work
- request an isolation note from the NHS (<https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>)
- share the evidence provided by the NHS Test and Trace service 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>).

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 5 steps for working safely and sector-specific advice (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

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
- the NHS Test and Trace service 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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1. 18 September 2020

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

2. 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.

3. 15 June 2020

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

4. 27 May 2020

First published.

Related content

- NHS Test and Trace: how it works (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>)
- COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection (<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>)
- 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>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>)

Explore the topic

- Protecting yourself and others from coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/protecting-yourself-and-others>)
- Testing for coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/testing>)
- Working safely during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/working-safely>)