

Covid-19: HR Guidance - Protecting yourself and others - Self/Household Isolation, Testing, Test and Trace

Last updated: 15 June 2020

This guidance is regularly being reviewed.

1. Information about Coronavirus (Covid-19)

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. Covid-19 is a new strain first identified in Wuhan City, China in January 2020.

Spread of Covid-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact (within two metres) with an infected person. The primary means of transmission is through respiratory secretions produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, an object or the hand of an infected person and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes. It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is intended for:

- employees with symptoms of Covid-19, or who have received a positive test result;
- employees with symptoms that may be caused by Covid-19 who are waiting for a test result, or who have not been tested and do not require hospital treatment, who must remain at home until they are well;
- employees living in households with someone who shows symptoms that may be caused by Covid-19.

Steps that all employees should take to stay alert and protect both colleagues and service users:

All employees can help control the virus if they all stay alert. This means they must:

- stay at home as much as possible
- work from home if they can
- limit contact with other people
- keep their distance if they go out (2 metres apart where possible)

- wash their hands regularly
- do not leave home if they or anyone in their household has symptoms.

What are the symptoms of Covid-19?

The most important symptoms of Covid-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- high temperature – this means to feel hot to touch on the chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

For most people, Covid-19 will be a mild illness. However, if employees have any of the symptoms above they must stay at home and arrange to have a test to see if they have Covid-19.

What should an employee do if they have symptoms of Covid-19?

If an employee has symptoms, however mild, or has received a positive test result, they should follow the advice below:

- go home, inform their manager, self-isolate at home for at least 7 days from when the symptoms started;
- do **not** go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital
- arrange to have a test to see if they have Covid-19
- following a positive test result, they will receive a text, email or phone to log into the NHS Test and Trace service
- they do not need to contact 111
- consider alerting the people they have had close contact within the last 48 hours to let them know they have symptoms of Covid-19
- if they feel they cannot cope with symptoms at home, and/or their condition gets worse, or symptoms do not improve after seven days, then use the [online NHS 111](#) service
- if they do not have internet access, call 111
- in a medical emergency, call 999

The employee's status should be recorded on Oracle using the special Covid-19 categories, for further information please refer to the Covid-19 absence recording guidance.

2. Information about self-isolation and household-isolation

Employees who are participating in self-isolation or household-isolation should follow this guidance:

- If they live alone and have symptoms of Covid-19, however mild, stay at home for seven days from the date the symptoms started.
- If they live with others and or one of the people they live with has symptoms of Covid-19, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.
- It is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.
- If an employee starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for seven days from the date their symptoms first appeared, regardless of what day they have reached in the original 14-day isolation period.

Employees or household members with symptoms should be tested, please see below for guidance on testing.

When can an employee end self-isolation / household-isolation?

Self-isolation:

If an employee has been symptomatic and lives on their own, they may end their period of isolation after seven days and return to work if they do not have symptoms other than a cough or loss of sense of smell/taste. If an employee still has a high temperature, they must keep self-isolating until their temperature returns to normal. After 7 days, if an employee just has a cough or anosmia (a loss of, or change in, sense of taste or smell), they do not need to continue to self-isolate. This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone. The 7-day period starts from the day when they first became ill.

Household-isolation:

If the employee lives with others and remains well, they may end their period of isolation after 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the household became ill.

In household-isolation, if the first person to become ill feels better and no longer has a high temperature, they can return to their normal routine after seven days.

If any other family member becomes unwell during the 14-day period, they should follow the same advice – i.e. after seven days of their symptoms starting, if they feel better and no longer have a high temperature, they can return to their normal routine.

If an employee develops Covid-19 symptoms late in the 14-day household-isolation period (e.g. on day 13 or day 14), the isolation period does not need to be extended, but the employee should stay at home for a further seven days. The 14-day household-isolation period will have greatly reduced the overall amount of infection the rest of the household could pass on.

What if an employee's health does not improve after their isolation period?

If an employee with symptoms of Covid-19 has not shown any sign of improvement and has not already sought medical advice, they should contact the [online NHS 111](#) service. If they do not have any internet access, they should call 111.

After 7 days, if an employee just has a cough or anosmia (a loss of, or change in, sense of taste or smell), they do not need to continue to self-isolate. This is because a cough or anosmia can last for several weeks once the infection has gone. The 7-day period starts from the day when they first became ill.

Can an employee work while they are in self-isolation / household-isolation?

If an employee is isolating but otherwise well, they should work from home wherever possible. If they are unable to work from home – for example, because of the nature of their job role – then managers should try to find a solution. This could involve redeploying the individual to another role that can be undertaken at home. However, if a solution cannot be found and the individual remains unable to work, they will continue to receive their normal pay.

What happens if an employee has another episode of Covid-19 symptoms after the end of their first period of self-isolation or household isolation?

If an employee develops new Covid-19 symptoms at any point after ending their first period of staying at home (self-isolation or household isolation) then they must follow the same guidance on isolation again.

This means they must stay at home for at least 7 days from when their symptoms started if they live alone and arrange to have a test. If the employee lives in a household, they must stay at home for at least 14 days from when the household

member's symptoms started, and seek for their household member to have a test.

This will help to ensure that they are continuing to protect others within their household and in their community by minimising the amount of infection that is passed on.

It is an unusual circumstance for an employee to develop symptoms twice, symptoms ordinarily develop and resolve within a 14 day period. Managers should maintain contact with the employee and advise for the employee to be tested in line with the National Testing Programme. Testing is most effective within 3 days of symptoms developing **and must be done** within 5 days of symptoms starting.

What happens if an employee's household member is still unwell at the end of the 14 day isolation, should the employee's isolation period be extended?

No. After 14 days self-isolation period, if the employee does not have symptoms they are able to return to work.

3. Testing

If employees have symptoms of Covid-19 they should immediately arrange for a test. Council employees are classed as essential workers; all essential workers with symptoms can access a test and these tests will be prioritised over those available for the wider public. These tests are also available to anyone over 5 years old who has symptoms of Covid-19 and lives with an essential worker.

Tests are also available to all members of the wider public, who have symptoms of Covid-19 and the wider public can access a test through the NHS website.

If an employee has symptoms of Covid-19, however mild, or has received a positive test result, they should immediately go home, inform their manager and self-isolate at home for at least 7 days from when the symptoms started and arrange to have a test to see if they have Covid-19.

4. Testing Process

Employees with symptoms of Covid-19 are advised to register for a test to find out whether they have the virus, and they can return to work sooner if they test negative and are well enough, have not had a high temperature for 48 hours and/or anyone they live with also tests negative. Test results are aimed to be returned within 48 hours.

By having a test it can tell employees if they have Covid-19 at the time the swab sample is taken. The test to tell if they've ever had Covid-19 ('antibody test') is not available yet.

Where is the test carried out?

When an employee orders a test either online or on the telephone, they will be provided with information on the options available for example:

Regional testing sites

There are a number of drive-through regional testing sites. To provide more information please watch the video explaining the process for drive-through testing:

[Covid-19 tests for essential workers](#)

Home testing

Home test kits can be delivered to an employee's door so they can test themselves and their family without leaving the house. Home test kit availability will be initially limited, but more will become available.

Mobile testing units

Mobile testing units travel around the UK to increase access to Covid-19 testing. They respond to need, travelling to test essential workers at sites including care homes, police stations and prisons.

New units are being brought into operation each day.

When should an employee have a test?

Testing is most effective within 3 days of symptoms developing and must be done within 5 days of symptoms starting. Employees must inform their line manager if they have a test booked for Covid-19, if the appointment is arranged during Council time the principles of attending medical appointments should be followed and reasonable 'time off' will be granted; if employees have questions regarding the testing process or difficulty in booking a test they must speak to their line manager in the first instance.

If an employee has symptoms of Covid-19 are they required to be tested?

Yes. The Government National Testing Programme has now expanded so that everyone with symptoms of Covid-19 can be tested. For Council employees, if they have symptoms of Covid-19 they should arrange for a test. Council employees are essential workers, all employees with symptoms can access a

test for essential workers and these tests will be prioritised over those available for the wider public. To arrange for a test please access [Covid-19 tests for essential workers](#) or call 119 if they have no internet access.

If an employee's test is negative, they and other household members no longer need to self-isolate, they can return to work as long they feel well enough to do so and there are no members of their household who have tested positive. If they have tested positive they should ensure they and household members self-isolate. Employees must inform their manager of the date and outcome of their test, providing the relevant evidence should it be required.

How does the test work?

The test involves taking a swab of the nose and the back of the throat, which can be done by the person themselves (self-administered) or by someone else (assisted).

What should an employee do if they are unable to attend a regional testing site e.g. unwell or travel difficulties?

If an employee is unable to attend a regional testing site, please request a home testing kit at [Covid-19 tests for essential workers](#). The advice is to register on the site as early as possible in the morning in order to obtain a home testing kit. If they have problems obtaining a home testing kit, they should keep trying, as stocks may become available, employees should inform their line manager if they have difficulty obtaining a home testing kit, to keep them abreast of the situation.

When should an employee arrange for a test?

It is imperative that employees immediately apply within the first 3 days of having symptoms. **Testing should be carried out within 3 days of symptoms developing and must be done within 5 days of symptoms starting.** Employees must inform their line manager if they have a test booked for Covid-19.

What should an employee do if a member of their household has symptoms of Covid-19?

If a member of an employee's household has symptoms of Covid-19 then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

As a household member that lives with an essential worker they can register for a test at [Covid-19 tests for essential workers](#) or call 119 if they have no internet access.

If during this time an employee starts to display symptoms, they will need to immediately arrange for a test within 3 days of symptoms developing and must be done within 5 days of symptoms starting. If the test is positive, they must continue to stay at home for at least 7 days and the National Test and Trace Service will get in touch to ask about their close contacts since they may need to self-isolate. Employees must keep their line manager informed of the situation and discuss work contacts with them

Can an employee refuse to have a test?

The Government has introduced the testing programme for every member of the public, the testing service forms a central part of the government's 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.

The Council strongly advises all staff that display symptoms to have a test, to support the Country's recovery strategy, to safeguard themselves and others, and to support the Council in getting those employees that do not have Covid-19 to return to work sooner.

5.Test and Trace

The NHS test and trace service was introduced on 28 May, this service forms a central part of the government's 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. The Test and Trace service will help to identify, contain and control COVID-19 and in doing so, reduce the spread of the virus. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace. They will be asked to share information about their recent interactions with other people. This could include household members, colleagues and other people who they have been in close contact with.

All Council employees are strongly advised to comply with the test and trace service which plays 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. Please see below.

NHS test and trace service:

- ensures that anyone who develops symptoms of Covid-19 can quickly be tested to find out if they have the virus- as detailed at above;
- helps trace close recent contacts of anyone who tests positive for Covid-19 and, if necessary, notifies them that they must self-isolate at home to help stop the spread of the virus.

How does the test and trace process operate?

Part 1: Employee with symptoms of Covid-19

1. isolate: as soon as an employee has Covid-19 symptoms, medical advice is clear: they must self-isolate for at least 7 days. Anyone else in their household must self-isolate for 14 days from when they started having symptoms.
2. test: order a test immediately at [Covid-19 tests for essential workers](#) or call 119 if they have no internet access.
3. Results: if the test is positive, the employee must inform their line manager. They must complete the remainder of their 7-day self-isolation. Anyone in their household must also self-isolate for 14 days from when they started having symptoms. If the employee's test is negative, then they and other household members no longer need to self-isolate, the employee can return to work as long they feel well enough to do so and there are no members of their household who have tested positive
4. Share contacts: if they test positive for Covid-19, the NHS test and trace service will send a text or email alert or call with instructions of how to share details of people with whom they have had close, recent contact and places they have visited.

Part 2: if an employee is contacted by the NHS test and trace service because they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19:

1. alert: they will be alerted by the NHS test and trace service if they have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19. The alert will usually come by text, email or phone call. They should then log on to the NHS test and trace website, which is normally the easiest way for them and the service to communicate with each other – but, if not, a trained call handler will talk through what must be done.
2. isolate: they will be told to begin self-isolation for 14 days from the last contact with the person who has tested positive. It's really important to do this even if they don't feel unwell because, if they have been infected, they could become infectious to others at any point up to 14 days. They should inform their line manager they are required to isolate and supply a copy of the notification. Household members do not need to self-isolate with them, if they do not have symptoms, but they must take extra care to follow the guidance on social distancing and handwashing and avoid contact with them at home
3. test if needed: if an employee develop symptoms of Covid-19, other members of their household must self-isolate immediately at home for 14 days and they must book a test at [Covid-19 tests for essential workers](#) or call 119 if they have no internet access. If the test is positive, they must continue to stay at home for at least 7 days and the test and trace service will get in touch to ask about their contacts since they must self-isolate. If

the test is negative, they must still complete their 14-day self-isolation period because the virus may not be detectable yet - this is crucial to avoid unknowingly spreading the virus.

If an employee has symptoms of Covid-19 should they alert their work colleagues?

When an employee 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 work colleagues, it is advised that the employee inform their manager so their colleagues can be alerted. If an employee advises their manager of close contacts at work, those employees should be advised to 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 employee 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.

How does test and trace help fight the virus?

The NHS test and trace service will help to control the rate of reproduction (R), reduce the spread of the infection and save lives. Employees playing their part through the actions set out below, they will directly help to contain the virus by reducing its spread. Essentially, this means that, thanks to our efforts, the government will be able to go as far as it is safe to go in easing lockdown measures.

Everyone can help in the following ways:

- if you develop symptoms, you must continue to follow the rules to self-isolate with other members of your household and order a test to find out if you have Covid-19
- if you test positive for Covid-19, you must share information promptly about your recent contacts through the NHS test and trace service to help us alert other people who may need to self-isolate
- if you have had close recent contact with someone who has Covid-19, you must self-isolate if the NHS test and trace service advises you to do.