COVID 19 – FAQs for Businesses

Testing

What is the difference between a PCR test for people with symptoms and an LFT test for people without symptoms?

Lateral flow testing (LFT) is a fast and simple way to test people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19, but who may still be spreading the virus. The tests are easy to use and give results in 30 minutes. Those who test positive must immediately self-isolate to avoid passing the virus on to others.

PCR (polymerase chain reaction) tests are the 'swab' tests that have been offered since March, and these are sent off to the lab in order to get your results. You receive your result in 2 to 5 working days by text or a phone call.

The PCR tests are better at finding very small amounts of the virus, especially early in infection, so these are used primarily in people **who have symptoms.**

What should I do if a member of staff tests positive?

- You should inform your local PHE Health Protection Team. Email WM.2019CoV@phe.gov.uk
- Staff member to start self-isolation at home immediately and access a Covid-19 test by visiting www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone if no internet access.
- **Staff member must stay at home** and continue **self-isolation for 10 days** from the date when their symptoms started. After this period, they can return to work if 48 hours fever free and feeling well; continue good hand hygiene. Staff member may return to work with a mild cough, which can persist for several weeks without being infectious.
- **Where the staff member tests Covid-19 positive, any close contacts will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and required to isolate for 10 days and get a Covid-19 test should they become symptomatic**
- If the staff member has been in the workplace ensure their work space is deep cleaned as well as any communal areas that the employee may have used.

Some big businesses have on-site testing for their staff, how do I arrange testing for my staff and how should I use it?

Key worker testing is available for any of your staff who need to be in the workplace. Rapid COVID tests are available at three local sites (Newington Resource Centre, Tudor Grange Leisure Centre and North Solihull Sports Centre) for staff who are asymptomatic. Staff need to book an appointment to visit one of our sites to get a rapid COVID test. (No walk-in appointments are available). We suggest testing staff every three to five days.

Please signpost eligible staff to https://www.solihull.gov.uk/COVID-19/Coronavirus to book their test. For updates including the opening hours for our test sites please visit: https://www.solihull.gov.uk/news/covid-test-site-updates

Businesses with more than 50 employees are now able to access lateral flow tests, which can produce results in less than 30 minutes. You can register to order tests if:

- your business is registered in England,
- you employ 50 people or more,
- your employees cannot work from home

The following link provides access to the registration forms needed to order rapid lateral flow tests for your employees https://www.gov.uk/get-workplace-coronavirus-tests

I have seen adverts for companies offering workplace testing. What do I need to take into account when considering this?

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Businesses with more than 50 employees are now able to access lateral flow tests, which can produce results in less than 30 minutes. You can register to order tests if:

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- If considering using a commercial testing offer, you will need to ensure the tests have been accredited. See the link below for a list of providers that meet the minimum standards. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/list-of-private-providers-of-coronavirus-testing/list-of-private-providers-of-coronavirus-testing

Can I ask my staff to get regular tests and if so where can they go to get tested if they don't have symptoms?

- Businesses are advised to have as many staff as possible work from home.
- Where this is not possible, key worker testing is available for any of your staff who need to be in the workplace. Rapid COVID tests are available at three local sites (Newington Resource Centre, Tudor Grange Leisure Centre and North Solihull

Sports Centre) for staff who are asymptomatic. Staff need to book an appointment to visit one of our sites to get a rapid COVID test. (No walk-in appointments are available). We suggest testing staff every three to five days.

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If you do have staff with COVID like symptoms, please require them to get tested quickly by going to https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-an-antigen-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/ and follow any advice from Public Health England very carefully.

Isolation

If a member of staff is required to isolate but has a negative test result can they come back to work before the end of the 10 day isolation period?

No, they need to continue to isolate as they may have the virus despite it being undetected at that time. There are some pilots around this but unless your workplace is part of a pilot the individual should continue to isolate

If a member of staff has had close contact with another member of staff that has tested positive but they haven't been asked to isolate through track and trace or the NHS app should they still come to work?

Whilst waiting for NHS Tract and Trace to contact them the member of staff should work from home if possible and the matter escalated by the employer to the local Health Protection team for further advice. See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-workplace-guidance#contents for further information.

A member of staff has been self-isolating for 10 days and feels well enough to come back to work but they still have a cough – should they come back to work?

If the 10 day self-isolation period has been completed and the member of staff has no fever symptoms for 48 hours, and they feel well enough, they may return to work. Coughs and loss of sense of taste may persist for some weeks.

A member of staff has been self-isolating for 10 days and feels well enough to come back to work but they still have a high temperature on and off – should they come back to work?

No the member of staff needs to be free of fever symptoms for 48 hours before returning to work.

A member of staff travels to work with another member of staff that has tested positive. They have no symptoms and haven't been contacted by track and trace or the NHS app – can they still come to work?

Whilst waiting for NHS Tract and Trace to contact them the member of staff should work from home if possible and the matter escalated by the employer to the local Health Protection team for further advice. See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-workplace-guidance#contents for further information.

Is the self-isolation period 10 days or 14 days?

Self-isolation period is 10 days.

If an employee has been exposed but not showing symptoms should I allow them to come to work?

No, it can take up to 14 days for the infection to incubate. The close contact should isolate for 10 days.

Social Distancing

Is it OK to hold meetings in person when attendees are on site anyway?

Virtual meetings should always be the preferred option wherever possible. If physical meetings cannot be avoided a risk assessment must be undertaken ensuring that social distancing is adhered to and masks are worn, the meeting room should be of appropriate size to accommodate the number of people attending, equipment such as chairs, desks, and light switches should be cleaned to reduce transmission and there should be adequate ventilation.

Can I hold training events for my staff?

The principle is that everyone should work from home during the national lockdown. If that is impossible and there is no other option e.g. the training can't be rearranged to a later date then it is possible for training to go ahead as long as the employer agrees and the provider is confident that the workplace is COVID-secure.

Virtual training sessions should always be the preferred option wherever possible. If this is not appropriate a risk assessment should be completed social distancing should be adhered to and masks should be worn. The size of groups should be minimised to allow compliance with guidelines in order to reduce transmission.

Some of our workforce travel to work in the same car but are not from the same household. Is this OK? What measures can they take to protect themselves?

Car sharing is not permitted with someone from outside your household or your support bubble unless your journey is undertaken for an exempt reason which includes travelling to work if you are an essential worker, or if car sharing is reasonably necessary as part of your work. Car sharing in relation to work should only happen when there is no other available option and staff should be discouraged from car sharing as far as possible.

It is difficult to socially distance during car journeys. Where it is essential to car share, you can reduce the risk of transmission by:

- sharing the transport with the same people each time,
- minimising the group size at any one time,
- opening windows for ventilation,
- travelling side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them, where seating arrangements allow,
- facing away from each other,
- considering seating arrangements to maximise distance between people in the vehicle,
- cleaning your car between journeys using standard cleaning products – make sure you clean door handles and other areas that people may touch,
- asking the driver and passengers to wear a face covering

What can be done to protect employees who cannot maintain social distancing of at least 2 metres from other employees / customers?

There are a number of ways, which can help to ensure that employees and customers are able to socially distance. For example:

- Limiting the number of people in the building, overall and in any particular congestion areas, for example doorways between outside and inside spaces.
- Suspending or reducing contact that cannot be undertaken without contravening social distancing guidelines. This may include re-thinking how assistance is provided to customers.
- Looking at how people move through the building and how you could adjust this to reduce congestion and contact between people, for example, queue management or one-way flow, where possible.
- Ensuring any changes to entrances, exits and queue management take into account reasonable adjustments for those who need them.

Further guidance can be found: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches

How can I protect employees who may be at higher risk for severe illness?

As an employer, you have a legal duty to protect workers from harm. You should make sure you consider the risk to workers who are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus (COVID-19) and put controls in place to reduce that risk.

The HSE have published useful guidance that may assist you to protect your vulnerable workers during the pandemic: https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/protect-people.htm

Individuals at the highest risk of serious illness from coronavirus will have received a letter from the NHS advising them to "shield". The government guidance refers to this group of people as "clinically extremely vulnerable". If an employee in this group cannot work from home, their employer should consider furloughing them and making a claim for them under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

The following link to government guidance provides more advice about clinically extremely vulnerable groups:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19

Should we be screening employees for Covid (such as temperature checks)?

Current government guidance advises individuals with a high temperature to self-isolate and get a COVID test as a precaution; however, not all fevers are caused by COVID-19 and not all COVID-19 patients have a fever.

The Lateral Flow Test (LFT) involves self-administering a nose and throat swab and may be a better solution for screening employees.

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PPE

Do masks and visors offer the same level of protection for my staff?

No, face masks and visors do not offer the same degree of protection.

A cloth face covering catches your respiratory droplets. It does not protect you, but may help protect people you come close to. Visors are not the best option for protecting yourself and others from COVID-19.

Visors may stop some spread of droplets from your nose or mouth. This is better than not wearing any face covering. But visors should only be worn if you have an illness or impairment that makes wearing a face covering difficult.

Where do I need to wear my face covering? E.g. in all common areas?

Employers must make sure that the risk assessment for their business addresses the transmission risks of COVID-19 this includes the use of facemasks.

Face coverings must be worn by retail, leisure and hospitality staff working in any indoor area that is open to the public and where they're likely to come into contact with a member of the public. Face coverings are also a legal requirement to wear while travelling on public transport and in most indoor public spaces.

Some people are exempt from the wearing of face coverings, including:

- People who cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability.
- People speaking to or assisting someone who relies on lip-reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate.

How and where do I dispose of my PPE?

You should:

- Provide extra bins for your staff and customers to throw away their waste face coverings and PPE used and any other additional waste, such as takeaway packaging and disposable tableware.
- Make sure that staff and customers do not put face coverings and PPE in a recycling bin as they cannot be recycled through conventional recycling facilities.
- Make sure bins are emptied often so they do not overflow and create litter.

You do not need to collect PPE separately but, if you do, you must describe and code your waste correctly.

Ask your waste contractor if there is anything else you need to do.

Do my customers need to wear face masks in my business?

Businesses must make sure that the risk assessment for their business addresses the transmission risks of COVID-19 this includes the use of facemasks.

Miscellaneous

What will happen if employees test positive for covid-19 at my company – what do I need to do and what support is available?

An outbreak is considered to be two or more test-confirmed cases of COVID-19 among individuals associated with a workplace with illness onset dates within a 14-day period.

COVID-19 early outbreak management information has been created to make sure that people who run businesses or organisations:

- know how to recognise and report an incident of coronavirus (COVID-19),
- are aware of measures local health protection teams may advise in order to contain it.

This information is contained within 'action cards' that have been designed for specific situations where an outbreak could occur. This could be a restaurant or office, a construction site or a place of worship.

The action cards are designed to be downloaded or printed and kept on hand in your business or organisation. You should follow your local restrictions in accordance with government guidelines.

Further information can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reporting-outbreaks-of-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-early-outbreak-management and at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-workplace-guidance#contents for full guidance for employers.

You should inform your local PHE Health Protection Team. Email WM.2019CoV@phe.gov.uk

Staff member to start self-isolation at home immediately and access a Covid-19 test by visiting www.nhs.uk/ask-for-a-coronavirus-test or by contacting NHS 119 via telephone if no internet access.

Staff workspace to be deep cleaned.

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.

What should my business do if an employee or visitor becomes unwell while at work?

Employees or visitors who have symptoms when they arrive at work or become sick during the day should immediately be separated from other employees, customers, and visitors and sent home and advised to book a PCR test. Employees who develop symptoms outside of work should notify their supervisor, stay at home and book a PCR test.

How often should we be cleaning the work areas?

As an employer, you must protect people from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect your workers and others from coronavirus (COVID-19). Coronavirus can transfer from people to surfaces. It can be passed on to others who touch the same surfaces. Keeping your workplace clean and frequent handwashing reduces the potential for coronavirus to spread and is a critical part of making and keeping your business 'COVID-secure'.

The following link provides more information about cleaning and the workplace https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings

Should I install / adjust the ventilation system?

The law requires employers to ensure an adequate supply of fresh air in the workplace and this has not changed during the pandemic.

Good ventilation, together with social distancing, keeping your workplace clean and frequent handwashing, can help reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus.

The link below will help you identify poorly ventilated areas of your workplace and provides steps you can take to improve ventilation. It will apply in most workplaces. https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/equipment-and-machinery/air-conditioning-and-ventilation.htm

What measures should be taken to protect an employee who must travel for work?

The following link provides advice for those who travel to work https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers