

Background and scope of guidance

This policy guidance assists this organisation and its contractors in implementing control measures and providing advice to staff on:

- the coronavirus, COVID-19
- how to help prevent spread of all respiratory infections including COVID-19
- what to do if someone suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 has been in a workplace setting
- what advice to give to individuals who have travelled to specific areas.
- advice for the certification of absence from work resulting from Covid-19.

This organisation is committed to supporting staff and contractors during the current outbreak of the virus and will do everything it can to prevent exposure.

We recognise the need to proceed with caution as the country gradually lifts restrictions in line with step 4 of the Covid Roadmap plan.

Information about the virus

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

The incubation period of COVID-19 is between 2 to 14 days. This means that if a person remains well 14 days after contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, they have not been infected. Most people will no longer be likely to transmit the virus 10 days after the onset of symptoms.

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19

The following symptoms may develop in the incubation period to someone who has COVID-19 infection:

- new continuous cough (coughing repeatedly).
- difficulty in breathing.
- fever (high temperature) - hot to touch either on your chest or back.
- loss or change to your smell or taste

Generally, these infections can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people (70 or older), and those with long-term conditions.

How COVID-19 is spread

From what we know about other coronaviruses, spread of COVID-19 is most likely to happen when there is close contact with an infected person.

It is likely that the risk increases the longer someone has close contact with an infected person.

Respiratory secretions containing the virus are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These are most likely to be the main means of transmission.

There are 2 main routes by which people can spread COVID-19:

- infection can be spread to people who are nearby or possibly could be inhaled into the lungs.
- it is also possible that someone may become infected by touching a surface, object or the hand of an infected person that has been contaminated with respiratory secretions and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes (such as touching doorknob or shaking hands then touching their own face).

Preventing spread of infection

Public Health England (PHE) recommends that the following general cold and flu precautions are taken to help prevent people from catching and spreading COVID-19:

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze. put used tissues in the bin straight away
- wash your hands with soap and water often – use alcohol-based hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.

If you are worried about symptoms, please call NHS 111. Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment. Further information is available on the PHE blog and NHS.UK.

Entering England

You may need to take COVID-19 tests or quarantine when you return to England. What you will need to do depends on:

- your vaccination status.
- where you have been.

Depending on these, you may need to:

- take a COVID-19 test before travel to England.
- book COVID-19 tests to take after you return.
- make arrangements for quarantine.

There are different rules if you have been in a red list country or territory in the 10 days before you arrive in England. Red list rules apply whether you are fully vaccinated or not.

Further details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-to-england-from-another-country-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

How long the virus can survive

How long any respiratory virus survives will depend on a number of factors, for example:

- what surface the virus is on
- whether it is exposed to sunlight
- differences in temperature and humidity
- exposure to cleaning products.

Under most circumstances, the amount of infectious virus on any contaminated surfaces is likely to have decreased significantly by 72 hours.

We know that similar viruses are transferred to and by people's hands. Therefore, regular hand hygiene and cleaning of frequently touched surfaces will help to reduce the risk of infection.

Guidance on face coverings

Face coverings are not classified as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which is used in a limited number of settings to protect wearers against hazards and risks, such as surgical masks or respirators used in medical and industrial settings and will be identified as part of the risk assessment process.

Face coverings are instead largely intended to protect others, not the wearer, against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of virus that causes coronavirus infection (COVID-19).

Different regulations exist for wearing face coverings in different parts of the UK about which you can find out more on devolved government websites:

- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Wales

In England, the wearing of face coverings is compulsory in shops and on public transport.

There are some circumstances, such as health, age, or equality reasons, whereby people are not expected to wear face coverings.

The government expects and recommends that people wear face coverings in crowded areas such as public transport, theatres and cinemas.

What to do if an employee becomes unwell

If someone becomes unwell in the workplace, the unwell person in the first instance should be removed to an area which is at least 2 meters away from other people. If possible, find a room

or area where they can be isolated behind a closed door, such as a staff office. If it is possible to open a window, do so for ventilation.

They should avoid touching people, surfaces and objects and be advised to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when they cough or sneeze and put the tissue in a bag or pocket then throw the tissue in the bin. If they don't have any tissues available, they should cough and sneeze into the crook of their elbow.

Arrangements should then be in place for them to travel home for self-isolation. If they need to go to the bathroom whilst waiting, they should use a separate bathroom if available.

The employee must inform their manager/supervisor of the incident.

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19, however mild must immediately self-isolate and arrange to have a test.

They may wish to alert the people that you have had close contact with over the last 48 hours to let them know that they might have coronavirus (COVID-19) but are still waiting for a test result.

The Test and Trace definition of close contact is:

- Having face-to-face contact with someone (less than 1 metre away).
- Spending more than 15 minutes within 2 metres of someone.
- Traveling in a car or other small vehicle with someone (even on a short journey) or close to them on a plane.

At this stage, those people should not self-isolate. Alerting those that you have been in contact with means they can take extra care in practicing social distancing and good hand and respiratory hygiene. They can also be more alert to any symptoms they might develop.

People who have tested positive will receive a text, email or phone call requesting that they log into the NHS Test and Trace website to create a confidential account where they can record details about their recent close contacts. If they do not have access to the web, then they will be phoned by a contact tracer working for the NHS Test and Trace service.

The information they provide will be handled in strict confidence and will enable the NHS Test and Trace service to contact those people who have been affected and provide them with advice on what to do next. This will help stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The people contacted will not be told the identity of the person with COVID-19, but by alerting them when first symptoms develop, you can help make sure that they are prepared for being contacted by the Test and Trace service.

Any fully vaccinated adult, children aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, people who can prove they are unable to be vaccinated for clinical reasons and people taking part or have taken part in an approved clinical trial for COVID-19 vaccine who are identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 – whether Omicron or not should take an NHS lateral flow test every day for 7 days.

Anyone identified as a close contact with a negative lateral flow test is strongly advised to limit close contact with other people outside their own household, especially in crowded or enclosed spaces and anyone who is more vulnerable. They should also follow government guidance on wearing face covering and working from home where possible.

Unvaccinated adults are not eligible for this new daily testing policy, they must self-isolate for 10 days if they are a contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 – Omicron or not – unless eligible for an existing workplace daily contact testing.

Anyone whose rapid test comes back positive or develops COVID-19 symptoms should self-isolate and take a confirmatory PCR test to verify the result.

From 22/12/21 The self-isolation advice for people with coronavirus (COVID-19) has changed. It is now possible to end self-isolation after 7 days (rather than 10 days), following 2 negative lateral flow device (LFD) tests taken 24 hours apart. The first LFD test should not be taken before the sixth day.

Where a worker has tested positive while not experiencing symptoms but develops symptoms during the isolation period, they should restart the 7-day isolation period from the day the symptoms developed.

Symptoms include a new continuous cough and/or high temperature, loss or change to your smell or taste.

If their symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 10 days, then they need to contact NHS111 online at 111.nhs.uk. If they do not have internet access, then they should call NHS111 or in a medical emergency call 999.

Outbreaks in the workplace

Contact your local PHE health protection team if you have had an outbreak and need further guidance.

If the local PHE health protection team declares an outbreak, you will be asked to record details of symptomatic staff and assist with identifying contacts. You should therefore ensure all employees records are up to date. You will be provided with information about the outbreak management process, which will help you to implement control measures, assist with communications to staff, and reinforce prevention messages.

What should I do if an employee has been advised by NHS Test and Trace to Isolate?

Should an employee of the company be advised by NHS Test and Trace that they are required to self-isolate for (initially) 10 days due to contact with a confirmed case, the employee should notify the company immediately.

Note:

Any fully vaccinated adult, children aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, people who can prove they are unable to be vaccinated for clinical reasons and people taking part or have taken part in an approved clinical trial for COVID-19 vaccine who are identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 – whether Omicron or not should take an NHS lateral flow test every day for 7 days

Unvaccinated adults are not eligible for this new daily testing policy, they must self-isolate for 10 days if they are a contact of someone who tests positive for COVID-19 – Omicron or not – unless eligible for an existing workplace daily contact testing.

The company requires that the employee complies with the recommendations of NHS Test and Trace in full.

Where it is possible, employees (who are not unwell) can continue to work from home whilst self-isolating, however if this option is not available, employees must take sick leave to ensure they self-isolate as per the recommendations.

Sick Pay will be paid from the first day of sick leave for NHS advised Test and Trace self-isolation. Employees will need to provide the text, email or letter they receive from the NHS Test and Trace team to the company, so that Statutory Sick Pay can be claimed. (Employers may allow workers to use full paid holiday leave to cover any required self-isolation periods if the employee wishes to do so.)

The company will comply with any information requests made by NHS Test and Trace wherever possible to do so, whilst adhering to GDPR. Further information can be obtained from www.gov.uk.

Where any employee of the company receives an NHS test and Trace notification to self-isolate that is determined to be related to a contact from a work activity, this shall trigger the company to conduct further review of COVID-19 risk assessments, procedures and control measures to determine if improvements or updates are required.

What to do if a member of staff or the public with suspected COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace

There is no need to close the workplace or send other staff home at this point. Most possible cases turn out to be negative. Anyone becoming unwell will follow the stay-at-home guidance.

What to do if a member of staff or the public with confirmed COVID-19 has recently been in your workplace

Closure of the workplace is not recommended. A risk assessment of each setting will need to be undertaken to determine the likely risk to others. Consider:

- any employee in close contact with the individual.
- anyone who has cleaned up any bodily fluids.
- any close friendship groups or workgroups.
- any employee living in the same household as a confirmed case.

The work area should continue to be cleaned and good hygiene practices maintained. Should any staff member become unwell then they are to follow the stay-at-home guidance.

Staff who have not had close contact with the original confirmed case do not need to take any precautions and can continue to attend work.

Certifying absence from work

By law, medical evidence is not required for the first 7 days of sickness. After 7 days, it is for the employer to determine what evidence they require, if any, from the employee. This does not need to be a fit note (Med 3 form) issued by a GP or other doctor.

Your employee will be advised to isolate themselves and not to work in contact with other people by NHS 111 if they are a carrier of, or have been in close contact with, an infectious or contagious disease, such as COVID-19.

We strongly suggest that employers use their discretion around the need for medical evidence for a period of absence where an employee is advised to self-isolate due to suspected COVID-19, in accordance with the public health advice being issued by the government.

Handling post, packages or food from affected areas

Employees should continue to follow existing risk assessments and safe systems of work. There is no perceived increase in risk for handling post or freight from affected areas.

Cleaning offices and public spaces where there are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Coronavirus symptoms are similar to a flu-like illness. Once symptomatic, all surfaces that the person has come into contact with must be cleaned including:

- All surfaces and objects which are visibly contaminated with body fluids.
- All potentially contaminated high-contact areas such as toilets, door handles, telephones and keyboards.

Public areas where a symptomatic individual has passed through and spent minimal time in (such as corridors) but which are not visibly contaminated with body fluids do not need to be specially cleaned and disinfected.

If a person becomes ill in a shared space, these should be cleaned using disposable cloths and household detergents, according to current recommended workplace legislation and practice.

Rubbish disposal, including tissues

All waste that has been in contact with the individual, including used tissues, and masks if used, should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full. The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied for disposal.

Vulnerable groups

Clinically extremely vulnerable people are advised to follow the same guidance as everyone else.

However, vulnerable groups should think carefully about the precautions they continue to take, these are documented in the guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/19-july-guidance-on-protecting-people-who-are-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-from-covid-19>

Fresh Air

When a person infected with COVID-19 coughs, talks or breathes, they release droplets and aerosols which can be breathed in by another person. Fresh air blows away these particles, reducing the chances of Covid-19 spreading.

We must consider workplace ventilation, and measures to improve ventilation by letting air in.

This may be through mechanical ventilation equipment, opening windows and doors (not fire doors), letting extractors run for longer etc. We will follow HSE published guidance on ventilation when assessing our control measures.

We continue to encourage the use of “outdoor meeting spaces” wherever possible.

Lateral Flow Testing

Lateral flow testing is freely available to staff, either through the use of rapid lateral flow test sites or through the use of home test kits – see links below.

<https://www.gov.uk/find-covid-19-lateral-flow-test-site>

<https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests>

For employee reassurance we encourage staff to undertake lateral flow testing twice per week. In the case of a positive result then the employee must not attend work and must follow Test and Trace guidance regarding self-isolation and PCR test confirmation.

Working from Home

From Monday 13th December office workers who can work from home should do so



Signed:

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On behalf of H&V Building Services Limited