

Coronavirus policy and procedure

Overview

This policy is designed to provide you with important information about the Coronavirus outbreak and what we are doing to support our employees, volunteers, and clients.

This policy is non contractual, it may be amended or added to at any time, and it will be updated, as appropriate, to r changing advice. It applies to all employees, volunteers, and clients, including those who work for us on a casual basis, but it doesn't apply to anyone we engage on a self-employed basis.

Symptoms

The main symptoms of Coronavirus (Covid-19) (Coronavirus Symptoms) are:

- a new, continuous cough
- a high temperature
- shortage of breath

But these symptoms do not necessarily mean you have the illness.

The Coronavirus Symptoms are like other illnesses that are much more common, such as cold and flu.

Current guidance indicates that among those who become infected, some will exhibit no symptoms. Of those who do develop an illness, the majority will have a mild to moderate illness like seasonal flu. A minority will develop complications severe enough to require hospital care, most often pneumonia and in a small number of these the illness may be severe enough to lead to death.

Preventative steps and hygiene

We are taking all reasonable steps to protect your health and safety.

We require all employees to follow these simple steps to help stop the spread of germs like Coronavirus.

Do:

- 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.
- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds – only use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- Always wash your hands when you get home or into work.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth if your hands are not clean.

At risk groups

Current advice is that the risk of severe illness increases amongst people aged 70 and over and those with underlying health risks, such as diabetes, heart disease and lung disease and those with weakened immun systems. Pregnant women have also recently been included in the “at risk” group.

Employees and volunteers are responsible to tell us if you think you are at risk:

- Because you are in one of the high-risk groups or you care for someone who is considered to be high risk; or
- Because you have recently returned from one of the countries considered to be high risk,
- You have been in contact with, or live in the same household as, someone who is being tested for, has tested positive for Coronavirus or has been advised to self-isolate because they have coronavirus symptoms.

We will conduct an individual risk assessment for anyone we believe to be in a high-risk group and will put in place appropriate safeguards.

What to do if you have Coronavirus symptoms

- If you become ill at work you and show any of the symptoms you should inform, you line manager and leave the building and go home immediately and arrange a COVID test.
- If you become ill at home, please do not come into work. You’ll need to telephone us in accordance with our usual absence policy.

What to do if you test positive for Coronavirus

Please advise us immediately if you test positive for Coronavirus, even if your symptoms are mild. You will not be able to return to work until you are considered fit by Public Health England or any other competent authority. You don’t need to obtain a fit note from your doctor, but please send to us anything you do receive which confirms your diagnosis and/or fitness to return to work.

If you feel well enough to work, please let us know. If your role lends itself to homeworking, we’ll discuss how we can facilitate this.

We will not inform anyone else about your condition unless it’s necessary to do so and we are legally able to. Our overriding obligation is to protect the health and safety of our employees, volunteers and clients and we may therefore have to speak to your colleagues and other people with whom you’ve been in close contact to protect them. Any information we disclose will be limited to what is necessary for that protection.

Public Health England are responsible for ‘contact tracing’ (tracing anyone you have been in close contact with), and we will cooperate with them as appropriate.

What to do if you are advised by a medical professional to self-isolate

New government advice is that people should stay at home if they, or anyone in their household has Coronavirus or has symptoms of Coronavirus. Those at high risk may also have to self-isolate even if they, or anyone in their household doesn't have symptoms.

This means you should:

- Stay at home.
- Not go to work or public areas
- Not use public transport or taxis
- Ask friends, family members or delivery services to carry out errands for you.
- Try to avoid visitors to your home, although it's okay for friends, family and delivery drivers to drop off food.

You may need to do this for up to 14 days (longer if you are in a high-risk group) to help reduce the possible spread of infection. Please follow the advice you are given.

If you feel well enough to work, please let us know. If your role lends itself to homeworking, we'll discuss how we can facilitate this.

The government has up to date information for individuals who have travelled overseas and returned to the UK. If you have been abroad recently, please consult this information and inform us if you are required to self-isolate.

Sick pay policy

If you are diagnosed with Coronavirus or have Coronavirus Symptoms and you are too unwell to work from home, we will pay you statutory sick pay from the first day of absence, provided you meet the qualifying conditions. You will need to comply with the usual rules around notification set out in our sickness policy, but you do not need to obtain a fit note unless your illness lasts for longer than 14 days.

We will also pay you statutory sick pay if you have to self-isolate because someone in your household has symptoms of Coronavirus, if you are not able to continue to work from home. You will need to meet the qualifying conditions and inform us immediately.

Self-isolation

If you are advised to self-isolate and don't have any symptoms, we will pay you statutory sick pay as set out above if you are not able to work from home. We may need to contact you to ask about work related issues, so please tell your manager the best number to contact you on.

Testing

The expansion of workplace testing will identify more positive cases of COVID-19 and ensure those who are infected isolate. This will reduce the spread of the virus and protect those who cannot work from home, and our vital services. Testing can provide confidence to workers and clients in the workplace, helping to protect and enable business continuity.

This programme is crucial given that around 1 in 3 people who are infected with COVID-19 have no symptoms so could be spreading the disease without knowing it. Broadening testing to identify those showing no symptoms will mean finding positive cases more quickly, and break chains of transmission.

We want as many employees as possible to sign up to regular tests. This will reduce the risk of transmission among those who cannot work from home and ensure vital are uninterrupted.

Lateral flow testing

Lateral flow testing 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 best-known example of a lateral flow test is the home pregnancy test kit.

The tests are easy to use and give results in less than 30 minutes. Lateral flow devices do not require a laboratory to process the test. They are designed to be intuitive and require minimal training to operate.

Those who test positive must immediately self-isolate to avoid passing the virus on to others.

You will be requested to undertake a lateral flow test if you are suspected to show symptoms or feel unwell to give an instant result.

PCR testing

A PCR test stands for polymerase chain reaction test. This is a diagnostic test that determines if you are infected by analysing a sample to see if it contains genetic material from the virus and it 100% accurate.

We accept that PCR testing is not a pleasant experience, however, with consent we are requesting that PCR testing is undertaken by each employee on a weekly basis. This should be on a Monday or at the start of a new rota cycle.

Although an employee is not legally bound to take a regular PCR test on request by the employer it is advisable to reduce the risk of spreading the virus amongst its work force.

Should an employee withdraw from PCR testing the employer will work with the employee to ascertain the reason behind withdrawing.

PCR testing is required to take place on a weekly basis. To maintain privacy, each employee will be issued with a PCR testing pack to register online themselves. They will be responsible for undertaking the test and sending it for analysing within the timeframes advised. Once the test results are received, the employee is responsible for reporting the result to their line manager.

Should the result returned show positive the employee is to remain at home and inform their line manager at the earliest opportunity to seek advice.

Business travel, meetings, events, and essential visits.

We will keep matters under review and will follow NHS and government advice. Currently, we recommend that you:

- Only travel if it is essential to do so outside of attending your normal workplace.
- Please hold telephone or video conferences unless a face-to-face meeting is essential.
- If you are due to attend external events, please check with the event organisations and speak to us if you are unhappy about attending.
- Take precautions for essential face to face meetings.
- Avoid shaking hands.
- Where there is a need to undertake an essential home visit, ensure that it has been agreed with your line manager and that you follow all safety precautions to include wearing face mask, gloves (if required) and maintain as much distance between you and the person you are visiting. Wash your hands and sanitise and avoid touching your face.

Please speak to your manager if you are worried about travelling or attending an essential visit.

Holidays

Some of you will already have pre-booked holidays abroad. Government advice is changing but if you intend to travel to a country or region not recommended by the government on the day you travel, you must tell us and may have to self-isolate when you return. You will only be paid if you can continue to work from home during this period, or you are eligible to receive statutory sick pay.

We recommend that you think carefully before booking holidays abroad and obtain appropriate insurance which covers cancellations.

If you wish to cancel any pre-booked holidays, please speak to your line manager. However, we will ask you to abide by the annual leave policy.

Responding to emergencies

Many of you will have caring responsibilities for family members or other people who rely on you. If you need to respond to an emergency (such as a school closure) please tell us as quickly as possible.

Workplace closure

If we must close or there's not sufficient work available (perhaps because less people are using our services) we will advise you as quickly as we can and discuss as to how we manage this either through holiday or flexi furlough will be discussed and agreed with you. You must not assume you will automatically be put on furlough; this will be a last resort.