

Test and Trace - Health and Safety Implications

The Coronavirus Tracking App has a vital part to play in reducing the spread of the virus, thus allowing businesses and schools to reopen. But what Health and Safety Implications are there for employers?

In summary, 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.

The announcement of the test and trace service is being promoted as the next major step in the UK's response to the pandemic, and only time will tell whether it succeeds in keeping the 'R number' below one as the country gradually begins to re-mobilise. There are, however, health and safety consequences of this new service.

The Government's workplace guidance on test and trace can be found [here](#). The two most notable messages from the Government appear to be that employers should make their workplace as safe as possible and encourage workers to heed any notifications to self-isolate and support them while in isolation.

In respect of making the workplace as safe as possible, guidance on this has already been published for employers on the [Government website](#). A short summary of the guidance is that businesses should:

1. Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment.
2. Develop cleaning, hand washing and hygiene procedures.
3. Help people to work from home.
4. Maintain two metres' social distancing when possible.
5. Where people cannot be two metres apart, manage the transmission risk.

In respect of encouraging workers to heed the notification to self-isolate and support them while in isolation, the guidance gives several examples of how businesses can support workers who need to self-isolate such as:

1. Not asking workers to attend the workplace.
2. Continuing to communicate with workers in self-isolation and provide support.
3. Allow people to work from home if they remain well and if it is practicable to do so. This might include finding alternative work that can be completed at home during the period of self-isolation.
4. If people cannot work from home, ensuring that any self-isolating employee is receiving sick pay and give them the option to use their paid leave days if they prefer.

When someone first develops symptoms and orders a test, they will be encouraged to alert the people with whom they have had close contact in the 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms. The Government guidance says that 'if any of those close contacts are colleagues, the person who has developed symptoms may wish to (but is not obliged to) ask their employer to alert those colleagues'.

So, while it is not a legal requirement, it would seem sensible for employers to encourage their staff to keep management informed if they are asked to isolate. This will allow workers who have had close contact with that employee to be warned and measures can be put in place to ensure that any workers who have potentially been exposed do not come into contact with any workers in a high risk category.



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