

Daily contact testing expands to 2,000 sites across critical sectors

Workplace daily contact testing sites will be expanded to a total of 2,000 sites across the country, with prisons, waste collection and defence among the critical sectors prioritised for the newest sites. This expansion follows last week's initial announcement of 800 sites for the food industry, transport workers, Border Force staff, frontline police and fire services.

Daily contact testing using rapid lateral flow tests will enable eligible workers who have received alerts from the NHS Covid 19 app or have been called by NHS Test and Trace and told they are a contact and to isolate, to continue working if they test negative each day.

Research carried out by the University of Oxford between April and June 2021 and supported by the Department of Health and Social Care found that in schools, daily contact testing was just as effective at controlling transmission as the current 10-day self-isolation policy. This pioneering work puts the UK at the forefront of scientific research.

Vaccines continue to be the best form of defence against the virus, and are highly effective at reducing the risk of serious illness, hospitalisation and death. So the government is continuing to encourage everyone to get fully vaccinated – and will work with employers participating in daily contact testing to encourage all their employees to get the vaccine.

Organisations are being contacted by NHS Test and Trace so they can mobilise sites this week to ensure critical workers can continue their vital roles safely. Employers and workers taking part in Daily Contact Testing will be provided with guidance about the protocols they must follow.

In addition to critical staff working in prisons, defence and waste collection, people working in energy, pharmaceuticals, telecoms, chemicals, communications, water, space, fish, veterinary medicine and HMRC will also be prioritised for the 1,200 new daily contact testing sites.

Lord Chancellor, Robert Buckland QC MP, said:

Daily testing will allow our frontline officers – who have been so dedicated and hardworking throughout the pandemic – to continue their essential work rehabilitating offenders and protecting the public.

Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick said:

Critical workers up and down the country have repeatedly stepped up to the challenge of making sure our key services are delivered and

communities are supported.

We all owe them a huge debt of gratitude and will continue to support them to do their jobs safely and securely. This expansion of the daily contact testing centres is vital and hugely welcome.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:

Our Armed Forces have worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic, ensuring operations and training at home and abroad continue while at the same time providing round the clock support to the nation's response to Covid.

Expanding the daily contact testing scheme is hugely welcome, allowing our personnel to continue that vital work across the UK and abroad.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Whether it's prison guards reporting for duty, waste collectors keeping our streets clean or workers in our energy sector keeping the lights on, critical workers have been there for us at every stage of this global pandemic.

As we learn to live with the virus, we will keep doing everything in our power to break chains of transmission and stop this virus in its tracks. Daily contact testing will play a vital role in this, helping minimise the potential for disruption caused by rising cases, while keeping staff protected.

Self-isolation remains an essential tool for suppressing the transmission of the virus.

People who have been identified as contacts are at least five times more likely to be infected with COVID-19 than other members of the public. Vaccines are highly effective at reducing the risk of serious illness, hospitalisation and death, and we are encouraging everyone to continue to get the vaccine to enable us to tackle the virus.

- NHS Test and Trace is working quickly with different sites to supply tests and set up daily contact testing sites.