**Government issues workplace guidance in England to control COVID-19 infection**

*Following the launch of the Government’s test and trace service it has issued workplace guidance in England to control the spread of the COVID-19 infection.*

From today people in England will be able to meet outside with six others from different households and some children will begin returning to school. However, the Government wants people to continue following its health and safety advice to ensure control of the infection, avoid a second spike, and to avoid overwhelming the NHS. The NHS test and trace service will be a vital component of this COVID-19 recovery strategy as it will provide an early warning if COVID-19 activity increases.

The guidance issued applies to England only, as Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland are taking their own measures.

**Infection control guidance for employers in England**

The Government’s guidance sets out how businesses and employers can support the test and trace system to help ‘slow the spread of the virus, protect the health and care system and save lives’, and highlights how it should be used in conjunction with its ‘[working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)’ guidance. (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>)

Beyond its own employees, the Government reminds employers they are also responsible for health and safety of others who may be affected in the business, such as contract workers, agency workers, customers, and suppliers. The guidance emphasises that all employers must make the workplace as safe as possible and encourage workers to follow any notifications to self-isolate – supporting them whilst in isolation.

The NHS test and trace system will be supporting employers in this by providing tests for anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 and alerting anyone who has been in contact with someone who has tested positive. To facilitate this, anyone who receives a positive test results will be asked to share information about anyone they have recently been in contact with.

**Five steps for working safely**

As part of the guidance, employers are encouraged to follow the Government’s ‘Five steps for working safely’ advice.

The five steps include:

1. Carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment
2. Develop cleaning, handwashing, and hygiene procedures
3. Help people to work from home
4. Maintain 2m social distancing, where possible
5. Where people cannot be 2m apart, manage transmission risk

The guidance states: ‘The measures employers put in place to maintain social distancing will depend on their individual business circumstances, including their working environment, the size of the site and the number of workers. The guidance will support employers to make an informed decision.

‘The NHS test and trace service does not change the existing guidance about working from home wherever possible.’

The guidance also reminds employers that they have a duty to ‘consult their workers, and unions where applicable, as part of their risk assessment’.

It has also issued sector specific guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) covering construction sites, factories, labs, restaurants, shops, homes, and vehicles to ensure safety guidance is followed in every setting.

**Workplace risks**

The test and trace service will be supporting employers if an outbreak of COVID-19 occurs with an outbreak control team from either the local authority of Public Health England.

If employees contract the virus and need to self-isolate employers must support them and must not ask them to attend the workplace but should support workers who need to self-isolate.

Self-employed people have also been advised to continue working from home to help control the spread of the infection. If this is not possible it encourages the self-employed to follow the ‘Five steps for working safely’ advice and offers further information on grant eligibility.

Self-isolation, financial help, and NHS test and trace guidance is also issued for workers, stating that: ‘Workers who think the contacts that have triggered these notifications are workplace contacts, should ask their employer to consider what further mitigating actions could be taken to reduce the risk of COVID-19, such as using screens to separate people or ‘cohorting’ to reduce the number of people each person has contact with.’

More information on the guidance can be found at [www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-workplace-guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-workplace-guidance).