

Changes to self-isolation rules from 16 August 2021

What is changing on the 16th?

As of 16 August, you will no longer be required to self-isolate after confirmed close contact with a positive case of covid-19 if you are fully vaccinated or under 18. Close contacts who are fully vaccinated will be advised, as now, to take a PCR test as soon as possible, so that they can have certainty about their condition.

Why did you not make this change sooner?

Although most restrictions have been lifted, and many people have been vaccinated, it is still possible to catch and spread COVID-19, even if you are fully vaccinated.

Waiting until mid-August to introduce this exemption has allowed more people to be fully vaccinated, significantly reducing the risk of severe illness and providing greater protection for people across the country.

Why are you making this change while cases are still high?

Unlike in previous waves, the rise in cases driven by the Delta variant is not translating into a significant increase in hospitalisations and deaths. This is due to the effectiveness of the vaccine at reducing the risk of transmission and severe illness.

When will I still need to self-isolate?

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 should, as now, self-isolate while they wait for the results of a PCR test. Everyone who tests positive will still be legally required to self-isolate, regardless of vaccination status. Close contacts of confirmed cases will still be legally required to self-isolate if they are over 18 and not fully vaccinated.

What if I haven't been vaccinated?

If you haven't been fully vaccinated, you will still need to self-isolate if you are identified as the close contact of a positive case, unless you are under 18.

What is meant by 'fully vaccinated'?

Individuals are fully vaccinated when they are two weeks' post-completion of a full course of an authorised vaccine administered in the UK. This is to allow for an antibody response to develop. You need both doses of a two-dose vaccine for maximum protection against COVID-19. You must have been fully vaccinated at the time of the contact with the positive case.

Can't people still catch covid after vaccination? Isn't this a big risk?

COVID-19 vaccines are effective at reducing the risk of transmission and severe illness. Vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic COVID-19 is estimated to be between 78%-80% (after both doses, where it is a two-dose vaccine). Although not everyone will be fully vaccinated from 16 August, the risk of onward transmission in the general population will be significantly reduced.

Should I get a test if I have COVID symptoms but have been vaccinated? Why?

Yes, if you have symptoms of COVID-19, arrange to have a PCR test. You should stay at home while you are waiting for a home test kit, a test site appointment or a test result.

Rapid lateral flow testing is available for free to anybody but is particularly important for those who are not fully vaccinated, those in education, and those in higher-risk settings such as the NHS, social care and prisons.

I am a contact of a positive case. Do I have to self-isolate while waiting for the results of my PCR test?

From 16 August, if you are fully vaccinated or under 18 at the time of contact with a positive case, you will be exempt from the requirement to self-isolate. You will instead be advised to take a PCR test as soon as possible. You may wish to limit social contact whilst waiting for the results of your PCR test, but you are not required to self-isolate.

What about 18-year-olds who have not yet had a chance to be fully vaccinated?

To give those recently turned 18 the opportunity to be fully vaccinated, they will be treated in the same way as under 18s up until the age of 18 years and 6 months.

If contacts who are fully vaccinated or children are exempt from self-isolation, what is the point of contact tracing/NHSTT?

All positive cases, regardless of age or vaccination status, are contacted for three reasons:

- o To help ensure that they self-isolate and to check whether they need support to do this
- o To determine who they might have infected
- o To establish where and when they might have been infected, so that we can identify potential local outbreaks.

Tracing close contacts allows us to give them appropriate advice on testing and/or self-isolation, depending on their vaccination status and age.

Is the government pursuing a strategy of herd immunity for under 18s?

The PM has made clear that we need to learn to live with the virus. As a result of the success of the vaccine programme, the Government is relaxing restrictions in accordance with the plan set out in the roadmap. Everyone who tests positive will continue to have to self-isolate, as will adult contacts who are not vaccinated and therefore at a higher risk of catching and transmitting the disease.

The Government continues to balance the impact of measures on teaching, learning, wellbeing and the functioning of education and care settings, against the COVID-19 risks. The risks of hospitalisation and intensive care admission in children due to infection are very low (approximately 8 per 100,000 population under 18 are admitted to hospital). The incidence of mortality in children as a result of Covid is extremely low.

ONS has recorded 13 deaths in children, all of whom had serious comorbidities. There are unquantified harms to children's educational, emotional and social outcomes as a consequence of self-isolation as well as infection.

How will people prove that they are fully vaccinated, or will it be on trust?

NHS Test and Trace will check whether you are legally required to self-isolate and will advise you what to do.

Why will you not be asking the fully vaccinated to undertake daily contact testing?

Any fully vaccinated person identified as a close contact will continue to be asked to take an immediate PCR test to help identify positive cases. Based on the effectiveness of the vaccine at reducing the risk of transmission and projected levels of vaccination, the government does not consider that daily LFD testing in addition to PCR testing would be a proportionate measure. Individuals are however encouraged to continue taking twice weekly LFD tests.

Why are you advising a PCR? Why not daily lateral flow tests?

Clinical advice suggests that a PCR test after two days will find a high proportion of cases. Based on the effectiveness of the vaccine at reducing the risk of transmission and projected levels of vaccination, the government does not consider that daily LFD testing in addition to PCR testing would be a proportionate measure. Individuals are however encouraged to continue taking twice weekly LFD tests.

Is the PCR test a legal requirement?

No, it will not be a legal requirement, but close contacts of confirmed cases will be strongly encouraged to take a PCR test to help identify positive cases and prevent risk to other people.

What happens if my PCR test comes back positive?

If your PCR test result is positive, you must self-isolate for 10 days to avoid spreading the infection to other people. This will continue to be a legal requirement. Those you live with – and any close contacts outside your household – will either be required to self-isolate or advised to get a PCR test, depending on their age and vaccination status.

Why does this apply to under-18s when younger people (16/17) can now get the vaccine?

Currently 16 and 17 year olds are only being offered a single dose of the Pfizer vaccine and therefore do not have the opportunity to be fully vaccinated.

Will people who are identified as close contacts still receive a 'ping' but then know that they are able to ignore it, or will NHS Test and Trace be aware that people have had two vaccinations and not contact them? What happens if a person has been vaccinated twice but they are still 'pinged'?

All contacts will still be traced so they are aware that they have had close contact with a positive case and can be given public health advice that is appropriate for their age and vaccination status. In the event that a person is double vaccinated they will not be required to self-isolate but will be advised to take a PCR test.

From 16 August, will staff already self-isolating be able to stop or is it only for newly identified close contacts from that date onwards who can stop self-isolating?

If they were fully vaccinated – or under 18½ - at the time of the contact with the person who tested positive, they can stop self-isolating on 16 August.

Does the requirement for all close contacts lift, or will it extend to the household/bubble too? E.g. I am thinking about a colleague who has a member of their household who is positive, will the whole of their household still need to isolate regardless of vaccination status?

From 16 August, all contacts who are fully vaccinated, or under the age of 18, will no longer have to self-isolate, including both household and non-household contacts.

What is meant by a close contact?

A contact is a person who has been close to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. You can be a contact any time from 2 days before the person who tested positive developed their symptoms (or, if they did not have any symptoms, from 2 days before the date their positive test was taken), and up to 10 days after, as this is when they can pass the infection on to others. A risk assessment may be undertaken to determine this, but a contact can be:

- anyone who lives in the same household as another person who has COVID-19 symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19

- anyone who has had any of the following types of contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19:
 - face-to-face contact including being coughed on or having a face-to-face conversation within one metre
 - been within one metre for one minute or longer without face-to-face contact
 - been within 2 metres of someone for more than 15 minutes (either as a one-off contact, or added up together over one day)

A person may also be a close contact if they have travelled in the same vehicle or plane as a person who has tested positive for COVID-19.

If you have been identified as a contact, you have been assessed as being at risk of developing COVID-19, even if you don't currently have symptoms. You should follow all the guidance in this document.

An interaction through a Perspex (or equivalent) screen with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 is not usually considered to be a contact, as long as there has been no other contact such as those in the list above.

If you are a contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 you will be notified by the NHS Test and Trace service via text message, email or phone and should follow this guidance closely.

Vaccine specific questions

If I am fully vaccinated, should I isolate if I have symptoms?

Those with symptoms of coronavirus should also continue to self-isolate and get a PCR test, wait until the results of the PCR test are received.

What exactly does "fully vaccinated" mean?

Fully vaccinated is anyone over 18 years and 6 months who has received their final dose of an MHRA approved vaccine under the UK vaccination programme, or the UK vaccine programme overseas, at least **14 days prior**.

If I am fully vaccinated and have been in contact with a positive case but have no symptoms, do I self-isolate?

No, as long as you meet you the criteria for "Fully Vaccinated" there is no requirement to self-isolate, but it is advised to take a PCR test.

What if I am a fully vaccinated contact who is already self-isolating on the 16th August?

Individuals are fully vaccinated when they are two weeks' post-completion of a full course of an authorised vaccine administered in the UK. This is to allow for an antibody response to develop. You need both doses of a two-dose vaccine for maximum protection against COVID-19. You must have been fully vaccinated at the time of the contact with the positive case.

If I am a contact who is under 18 years and 6 months of age, will I have to self-isolate?

There will be no requirement to self-isolate, but you will be encouraged to take an age-appropriate test as follows:

- 12-18.5 years old – PCR
- 5-12 years old – PCR
- 0-4 years old - PCR where the positive case is in the same household, **no test** for non-household contacts

I am over 18 years and 6 months taking part in a Covid-19 vaccine clinical trial, do I need to self-isolate as a contact of a positive case?

There is no requirement to self-isolate, it is advised to take a PCR test.

I am over 18 years and 6 months, but I cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons, do I have to self-isolate if I am a contact?

There is no requirement to self-isolate, it is advised to take a PCR test.

I have received my vaccines, but only within the last 14 days, do I need to self-isolate if I am identified as a contact?

Individuals who not fully vaccinated (i.e. 14 days' post-final dose) at the point of contact occurring will need complete the full self-isolation period even if their last contact with the index case was 13 days after their final dose.

I work in a vulnerable healthcare setting will I need to self-isolate after being in contact with a positive case of Covid-19?

If you are over 18 years and 6 months, you are no longer advised to self-isolate, provided that you demonstrate a negative PCR test and take daily LFD tests. PHE has recommended that a risk assessment is undertaken if staff work with highly vulnerable patients/residents.

Workplace Daily Contact Testing (DCT)

Will the HM Government support people who are double vaccinated but choose to self-isolate through grants?

From 16 August, fully vaccinated contacts will no longer be required to self-isolate and will therefore not be eligible for the Test and Trace Support Payment.

How will the guidance be framed in terms of expectations on the employer?

If employers choose to continue implementing the Workplaces Daily Contact Testing (DCT) scheme after 16 August, they must continue to adhere with the standard operating procedure for Daily Contact Testing. This includes implementing the appropriate measures for keeping staff safe whilst participating in DCT. Staff can decide not to participate in DCT if they are double vaccinated.

Will England/Scotland follow the same route of warning people of contact like Wales have said they will do?

We will still trace all contacts so that they are aware they have had close contact and to provide them with appropriate public health advice.

Do people need to complete a PCR test on day 2 and 8 as Wales have said. Is this recommended or mandatory?

All close contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 cases, including those taking part in daily contact testing, are strongly advised to take a PCR test after being identified as a contact, but it is not a legal requirement. This advice will also continue to apply to fully vaccinated contacts or those under the age of 18 from 16 August onwards. Contacts are advised to take this test as soon as possible, but there is no specified day.

Does any Lateral Flow Testing (LFD) advice change as part of this or stay the same?

Those who are not fully vaccinated who participate in the Workplace Daily Contact Testing scheme after 16 August will still be required to follow the DCT testing regime. Other LFD testing guidance will continue to be reviewed and guidance updated.

Do I need to keep doing DCT if I'm in the middle of my testing period on 16 August and I'm fully vaccinated?

From 16 August, contacts participating in the Workplace Daily Contact Testing scheme who are fully vaccinated at the time of the contact or under the age of 18 will no longer have to self-isolate and will therefore not be required to continue with their Daily Contact Testing regime if this began before 16 August. We would, however, recommend that people finish the Daily Contact Testing regime but it is optional to do so.

What is the cut-off date for sites to begin DCT? Can they commence after 16 August?

Workplaces can continue to commence Workplace Daily Contact Testing after 16 August, if all criteria for implementing DCT are met.

What are employers' responsibilities after August 16?

If employers choose to continue implementing the Workplaces Daily Contact Testing scheme after 16 August, they must continue to adhere with the standard operating procedure for DCT. This includes implementing the appropriate measures for keeping staff safe whilst participating in DCT.

Self-Isolation Support Payment

What's happening to Financial Support and the Test and Trace Support Payment from 16 August?

Financial support measures will continue to be available to people who are still required to self-isolate from 16 August 2021 and until at least the end of September 2021.

Who can apply?

You might be able to get a payment of £500 to support you during self-isolation if you live in England and meet all the following criteria:

- You have been told to stay at home and self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or the NHS COVID-19 app, either because you have tested positive for COVID-19 or have recently been in close contact with someone who has tested positive.
- You have responded to messages from NHS Test and Trace and have provided any legally required information, such as details of your close recent contacts
- You are employed or self-employed
- You are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result of self-isolating
- You are currently receiving, or are the partner of someone in the same household who is receiving, at least one of the following benefits:
 - o Universal Credit
 - o Working Tax Credit
 - o Income-based Employment and Support Allowance
 - o Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - o Income Support
 - o Housing Benefit
 - o Pension Credit

If you are not on one of these benefits, but you meet the other criteria, you are on a low income and you will face financial hardship as a result of self-isolating, you could be eligible for a £500 discretionary payment.

Local authorities are responsible for the criteria used for discretionary payments in their area.

If you are eligible for either the Test and Trace Support Payment or a discretionary payment, you will receive the £500 payment in addition to any benefits and Statutory Sick Pay that you currently receive.

- See [Information on the eligibility criteria](#)

If you are not legally required to self-isolate, but you are the parent or guardian of a child who has been told to self-isolate, you could be eligible for a £500 Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary payment if all the following apply:

- You're the parent or guardian of a child in your household who is self-isolating, and you need to take time off work to care for them
- Your child is aged 15 or under, or aged 25 or under with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, normally attends an education or childcare setting, and has been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or by their education or childcare setting
- You're unable to work from home and will lose income because you have to care for your child while they are self-isolating
- You meet all the other eligibility criteria for a Test and Trace Support Payment or discretionary payment.

App

If someone has been vaccinated and receives a notification from the app to self-isolate, what should they do?

From 16th August those who are fully vaccinated or under 18 years of age and identified as a contact will **not** need to self-isolate; including if they have received a notification from the app. Instead, they will be advised to get tested. The app is being updated to reflect this and signpost people to testing. For users who have not been fully vaccinated yet, we recommend they continue to follow the app's advice to self-isolate, as they are at risk of having and spreading the virus.

As we move away from legal restrictions to taking more personal responsibility the app is perfectly placed to help its users make informed decisions.

We encourage people to keep using the NHS COVID-19 app after they've had the vaccine.

Employers

Can my employer require proof of my vaccination status?

Your COVID status is special category data, as it is your private health information. Your employer's reason for checking or recording your COVID status must be clear, necessary and transparent. If they cannot specify a use for this information and are recording it on a 'just in case' basis, or if they can achieve their goal without collecting this data, they are unlikely to be able to justify asking for it.

As an employer, do I have to check my workers' vaccination status?

No, they must let you know if they are legally required to self-isolate. They can be fined if they fail to do this. If they are exempt from self-isolation as a contact because they are fully vaccinated, then no action is needed. Employers are not expected to check their workers' vaccination status. However, if a worker informs you that they are under a legal duty to self-isolate, then you must not ask them to come into work.

How do I know if someone I employ is exempt from self-isolation if I can't check their vaccination status?

It is up to workers to inform their employers if they are under a legal duty to self-isolate. If they fail to do so – including falsely claiming they are not required to self-isolate – then they can be fined. They may also be subject to your usual disciplinary processes.

If I am exempt from self-isolation, can I still choose to do so?

Individuals who are fully vaccinated can still choose to self-isolate if they have close contact with a positive case. However, you will not necessarily be eligible for financial (such as statutory sick pay) or practical support while self-isolating. If you are employed, then depending on the specific circumstances, your employer may require you to continue to come into work if you are exempt from self-isolation.

Can my employer force me to come into work if I am exempt from self-isolation?

If you are not legally required to self-isolate, then your employer may require you to continue to come into work, depending on specific circumstances.