

Government Guidance

17th January 2022

1. What has changed

The self-isolation advice for people with coronavirus (COVID-19) has changed. It is now possible to end self-isolation after 5 full days if you have 2 negative LFD tests taken on consecutive days. The first LFD test should not be taken before the fifth day after your symptoms started (or the day your test was taken if you did not have symptoms). The self-isolation period remains 10 full days for those without negative results from 2 LFD tests taken a day apart.

2. Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for:

- people with [symptoms](#) that may be caused by COVID-19, including those who are waiting for a COVID-19 test result
- people who have received a positive COVID-19 LFD or PCR test result (whether or not they have symptoms)
- people who currently live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms, or with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 by LFD or PCR test

In this guidance a household means:

- one person living alone
- a group of people (who may or may not be related) living at the same address and who share cooking facilities, bathrooms or toilets, or living areas – this may include students in boarding schools or halls of residence who share such facilities
- a group of people who share a nomadic way of life for example those who live on Traveller sites, in vehicles or on canal boats

Follow separate [guidance if you have had contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 but do not currently live in the same household as them](#).

If you have [arrived in England from overseas you may also need to self-isolate, but should follow separate guidance on travelling to England from another country during COVID-19](#).

This guidance applies in England.

3. Symptoms

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people, COVID-19 will be a mild illness. However, if you have any of the symptoms listed above, even if your symptoms are mild, stay at home and [arrange to have a test](#). You do not need to take a PCR test if you have already taken an LFD test and the result was positive.

There are several other symptoms linked with COVID-19. These symptoms may have another cause and are not on their own a reason to have a COVID-19 PCR test. If you are concerned about your symptoms, seek medical advice.

If you have received one or more doses of COVID-19 vaccine and have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 or have received a positive LFD or PCR test result, you should still follow this guidance. This is because it is still possible to get COVID-19 and spread it to others, even if you are vaccinated.

4. Tests for COVID-19

There are 2 main types of test currently being used to detect if someone has COVID-19:

- polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests
- lateral flow device (LFD) antigen tests – also known as rapid lateral flow tests

4.1 PCR tests

PCR tests detect the RNA (ribonucleic acid, the genetic material) of a virus. It takes some time to get the results because PCR tests are usually processed in a laboratory.

PCR tests are the best way to diagnose COVID-19 infection in people who have symptoms and who also may require treatment. If you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19, you should [arrange to have a PCR test.](#)

4.2 LFD tests

LFD tests detect proteins in the coronavirus and work in a similar way to a pregnancy test. They are reliable, simple and quick to use and are very good at identifying people who have high levels of coronavirus and are most likely to pass on infection to others. When rates of infection are high, it is very likely that people with a positive LFD test result have COVID-19.

LFD tests can be taken by people at home (self-reported tests) or under the supervision of a trained operator who processes the test, reads, and reports the result (assisted tests). LFD tests are mainly used in people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19. If you take an LFD test and the result is positive, you should report the result and

follow this guidance. You do not need to take a follow-up PCR test, unless:

- you wish to claim the [Test and Trace Support Payment](#) – to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment, you must have tested positive for COVID-19 following a PCR test or an assisted LFD test
- you have received [an email or letter](#) from the NHS because of a health condition that means you may be suitable for new COVID-19 treatments – if this applies to you and you develop any COVID-19 symptoms, you should use the PCR test kit that was sent to you in the post for this purpose; if you have not received a PCR test kit you can [arrange to have a PCR test](#)
- you are taking LFD tests as part of research or surveillance programmes, and the programme asks you to take a follow-up PCR test
- you have a positive day 2 LFD test result [after you arrive in England](#)

If your LFD test result is positive you may go on to develop symptoms in the next few days. If you develop any of the [main symptoms](#) of COVID-19 and you are concerned, or your symptoms are worsening, contact 111 or speak to your GP. In an emergency dial 999.

5. If you have COVID-19 symptoms or a positive LFD or PCR test result

If you develop any of the main symptoms of COVID-19, stay at home and self-isolate immediately.

If you have a positive LFD or PCR test result but do not have any of the [main symptoms of COVID-19](#), stay at home and self-isolate as soon as you receive the results. You should do this even if you have received one or more doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

Other people in your household might need to self-isolate too. Please see section below for information [on what the other members of your household need to do](#).

5.1 Order a PCR test if you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19

If you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19, [arrange to have a PCR test by ordering it online](#) or by calling 119. You do not need to take a PCR test if you have already taken an LFD test and the result was positive.

You should stay at home while you are waiting for a home test kit, a test site appointment or a test result. You can leave your home in a few specific circumstances, but do not go to work, school, or public areas and do not use public transport or taxis. See the circumstances in which [you can leave home](#).

If you need to leave your home to get to a test site, wear a well-fitting face covering made with multiple layers, stay at least 2 metres apart from other people who you do not live with, and return home immediately afterwards.

5.2 Stay at home and self-isolate

Stay at home and self-isolate if you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 or if you have a positive LFD or PCR test result. Self-isolation will help protect your family, friends and the wider community by reducing the risk that you will pass the infection on to others.

Your self-isolation period starts immediately from when your symptoms started, or, if you do not have any symptoms, from when your positive LFD or PCR test was taken, whichever test was taken first. Your self-isolation period includes the day your symptoms started (or the day your test was taken if you do not have symptoms), and the

next 10 full days. It may be possible to end your self-isolation earlier (see below).

This means that if, for example, your symptoms started at any time on the 15th of the month (or if you did not have symptoms but your first positive COVID-19 test was taken on the 15th), your self-isolation period ends at 23:59hrs on the 25th of the month.

You can return to your normal routine and stop self-isolating after 10 full days if your symptoms have gone, or if the only symptoms you have are a cough or anosmia, which can last for several weeks. If you still have a high temperature after 10 days or are otherwise unwell, stay at home and seek medical advice.

You may be able to end your self-isolation period before the end of the 10 full days. You can take an LFD test from 5 days after the day your symptoms started (or the day your test was taken if you did not have symptoms), and another LFD test on the following day. If both these test results are negative, and you do not have a high temperature, you may end your self-isolation after the second negative test result.

[Report your LFD test results](#) after taking each test.

You should not take an LFD test before the fifth day of your self-isolation period, and you should only end your self-isolation after you have had 2 negative LFD tests taken on consecutive days. You should stop testing after you have had 2 consecutive negative test results.

This guidance also applies to children and young people who usually attend an education or childcare setting.

You will be unable to use either your domestic or travel NHS COVID Pass for 10 days following a positive test result.