Coronavirus (COVID-19) workplace testing: guidance for private-sector employers and third-party healthcare providers

Updated 26 February 2021

Why you should test your workforce

The expansion of workplace testing will identify more positive cases of COVID-19 and ensure those infected isolate. This will reduce the spread of the virus and protect those who cannot work from home, and our vital services.

This programme is crucial given that around 1 in 3 people who are infected with COVID-19 have no symptoms so could be spreading the disease without knowing it. Broadening testing to identify those showing no symptoms will mean finding positive cases more quickly, and break chains of transmission.

We want as many employers as possible to sign up to regularly test their employees. This will reduce the risk of transmission among those who cannot work from home and ensure vital public and economic services can continue.

It is a voluntary decision for employers to run testing programmes for their staff. Testing can provide confidence to workers and customers in the workplace, helping to protect and enable business continuity.

Lateral flow testing

Lateral flow testing is a fast and simple way to test people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19, but who may still be spreading the virus. The best-known example of a lateral flow test is the home pregnancy test kit.

The tests are easy to use and give results in less than 30 minutes. Lateral flow devices do not require a laboratory to process the test. They are designed to be intuitive and require minimal training to operate.

Those who test positive must immediately self-isolate to avoid passing the virus on to others.

Read https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-lateral-flow-antigen-testing-for-people-without-symptoms#who-can-be-tested for further information.

How often testing should be performed

It is recommended that private-sector employers offer their workforce (who are on-site) access to a minimum of 2 lateral flow tests every week. This will help identify staff who are carrying the virus without displaying symptoms, reducing the risk of transmission.

Options for workforce testing

Every employer and every sector is unique. So, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) aims to be pragmatic about which delivery channels can be used.

This is in line with the ambition to provide as many people as possible who do not have COVID-19 symptoms and need to leave home for work with access to testing.

There are 3 options for businesses:

Option 1: employer-led set-up ('DIY')
- ➢ Employers can set up their own on-site testing programmes, outside of that which currently exists with the NHS Test and Trace service.

Option 2: use a third-party provider
- ➢ DHSC is aware of third-party private-sector (non-NHS) providers undergoing UKAS accreditation who may be able to provide on-site COVID-19 testing services.
- ➢ Employers who would like on-site testing but would prefer a private provider to organise and run the testing on their behalf can partner with one of the providers on the list of providers: general testing.
- ➢ Employers will need to pay for this service provision, but are still eligible to order the free government testing kits by registering to order workplace coronavirus tests. The onus falls upon the employer to ensure that they order the test kits.
- ➢ In partnering with a third-party provider, responsibility still lies upon the employer to ensure that they register to order a sufficient number of test kits.

Option 3: community testing
- ➢ For organisations in the public and private sector that have fewer than 50 employees, access to testing is through local authorities who are establishing testing sites for those without symptoms within their local areas.
- ➢ If you are an organisation with fewer than 50 employees, a sole trader, self-employed or a member of the general public, visit your local authority's website to find out more about their testing services.

https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do

https://www.westminster.gov.uk/testing