

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Coronavirus: request a reasonable excuse letter

Self-isolation remains an essential tool in our national efforts to reduce the spread of coronavirus. In the small number of situations where the self-isolation of close contacts would result in serious disruption to critical services, a limited number of named workers may be able to leave self-isolation under specific controls for the purpose of undertaking critical work only.

This process is only intended to run until 16 August 2021, when fully vaccinated close contacts will be exempt from self-isolation.

The test that is applied when considering if an individual would have a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend work is whether they work in critical elements of national infrastructure and whether their absence would be likely to lead to the loss or compromise of this infrastructure resulting in one or both of the following:

- major detrimental impact on the availability, integrity or delivery of essential services—including those services whose integrity, if compromised, could result in significant loss of life or casualties
- significant impact on national security, national defence, or the functioning of the state

The process is exceptional for these specific circumstances. It is not intended to avoid all disruption to services that will result from the need for people to self-isolate.

Further guidance on NHS Test and Trace in the workplace and this process is available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Eligibility for a reasonable excuse

This will only apply to a very narrow cohort of critical workers. In Defra sectors, we currently expect that only workers in the sub-populations and critical sites set out in **Annex A** may meet the above test (if this is updated we will share an updated annex).

This policy applies to **named** workers in specifically approved workplaces who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-final dose) and who have been identified as [close contacts](#). Having a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend work is contingent on following the controls set out below, agreed by the Department of Health and Social Care, to mitigate the risk of increased infection. This is **not** a blanket exemption for all workers in a sector.

The process applies only to workers who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-final dose) and will be solely for the purpose of attending work. Workers will otherwise need to continue to self-isolate as directed by NHS Test and Trace.

It applies to asymptomatic contacts only. It does not apply to any workers who have tested positive to coronavirus and should also not be used for contacts who develop symptoms regardless of their role or vaccination status. In these circumstances you should continue to self-isolate as now and follow relevant [guidance](#).

Process

Where employers believe the self-isolation of certain key employees as contacts would result in serious disruption to critical services, they should complete the attached request form for all employees that are required to be covered by this process.

If you need more information or have a query about submitting this request form, please email emergencies@defra.gov.uk.

If we consider that relevant individuals have a reasonable excuse not to self-isolate for a period necessary to enable them to perform the critical tasks you identify, **the employer will be issued with a letter** confirming, subject to observance of the conditions set out in that letter, this is Defra's view in relation to relevant named individuals. It is ultimately for those enforcing the legal duty self-isolate to determine what is and is not a "reasonable excuse", but reasonable excuse letters will allow relevant individuals to demonstrate that this is the Defra view.

Conditions

Any reasonable excuse provision will apply **until the date specified on approval letters**. A further request will be required if the worker is required beyond the review date. To be eligible, the worker needs to meet a set of conditions that will be set out in the letter, including:

- a. Critical workers who attend work in these exceptional circumstances will need to self-isolate until a negative PCR test result. It may be reasonable **if strictly necessary** to go to work before receiving the results of the PCR test, but only if they have taken an LFD test just before doing so and received a negative result.
- b. Critical workers would need to take daily LFD tests, report the results daily to the line manager and self-isolate immediately if they test positive.
- c. Anyone showing any Covid-19 symptoms, no matter how mild, will be required to self-isolate and get a new PCR test. Critical workers will then be unable to go to work, until you have a new PCR test showing a negative result.
- d. All critical workers can only leave self-isolation to attend - and travel to and from - work for specific, named purposes.
- e. You may, if strictly necessary, travel on public transport or with others to and from work but should wear a face covering at all times.
- f. Social distancing should be optimised and, wherever possible, maintained at all times in the workplace. Please ensure that you limit the use of shared/common areas at work, such as canteens and staff rooms, as much as possible.

Please note that it will be the responsibility of employers to ensure, where applicable, that these controls have been met.

Annex A: List of critical sub-populations that may have a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend critical work, subject to the process set out above

Agri-food chain

- Manufacturing maintenance engineers, quality assurance technicians, and highly skilled supervisors, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Specialist Reach Truck drivers, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted and only where the use of this type of truck is essential in the movement of critical goods
- Official Vets, Meat Hygiene Inspectors, Poultry Health Inspectors, Environmental Health Officers and Certifying Support Officers necessary for preventing immediate risk to food safety or animal welfare in processing plants, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted

Waste

- Staff essential to the removal and processing of healthcare, hazardous, or municipal waste, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Staff essential to the running of incineration plants, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Landfill operators, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted in a particular region or local area

Water and wastewater

- Water engineers, staff/contractors working on repair of mains/supply interruption, chemical and technical specialists, emergency response practitioners, and control room staff whose immediate attendance at work is essential to maintaining critical services, all subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted

Veterinary medicines

- Batch testing laboratory staff and Qualified Persons essential to the batch release of medicines, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Laboratory staff essential to the production of veterinary medicines, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted

Incident response and prevention

- Government vets and Official Veterinarians responding to animal disease outbreaks or cases of serious animal health/welfare concern, subject to all other mitigations being exhausted
- Environment Agency staff operating the Thames Barrier and other critical flood defence assets, and Environment Agency staff on response teams in regional areas across the country to ensure effective protection of life and property in the event of a flood or other major incident, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Navigation Authority staff whose roles/tasks include essential maintenance on assets with high consequence of failure and/or essential health and safety activity which mitigates risk of loss of life, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted