**Changes to the national guidance on the 11th January 2022.**

On the 11th of January, there were several changes to the national [stay at home guidance in England](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance).

There is now no requirement for people to get a confirmatory PCR test after receiving a positive lateral flow (LFD) test, unless:

* they wish to claim the [Test and Trace Support Payment](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme)
* have received [an email or letter](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/letter-to-patients-important-information-about-new-treatments-for-coronavirus/) from the NHS because of a health condition that means they may be suitable for new COVID-19 treatments
* they are taking LFD tests as part of research or surveillance programmes, and the programme asks them to get a PCR test
* they have a positive day 2 LFD test [after arriving in England](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-to-england-from-another-country-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

Anyone who tests positive on an LFD test should immediately isolate and follow the [stay at home guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection). Their self-isolation period starts immediately from when their symptoms started, or, if they do not have any symptoms, from when their positive LFD was taken.

People should report the LFD test result on the [national website](https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result) (or by calling 119 if they cannot use the online service).

People who are self-isolating because of a positive LFD test, who did not have any symptoms when they were tested, **no longer** need to re-start a new self-isolation period if they develop symptoms within the isolation period. They are also not required to get a PCR test (unless they need to get one because of one of the reasons listed above).

Anyone who develops one of the three main symptoms of COVID-19 should still get a PCR test (unless they have already taken an LFD test and the result was positive).

We have provided examples of several scenarios to illustrate this guidance.

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| --- | --- |
| **Scenario** | **PCR needed?** |
| LFD is positive. Person has no symptoms of COVID-19 | No\* |
| LFD is positive. Person did not have symptoms of COVID-19 when the LFD was taken, but then symptoms develop during the isolation period | No\* |
| LFD is positive. Person had symptoms of COVID-19 when the LFD was taken. | No\* |
| LFD is negative. Person had symptoms of COVID-19 when the LFD was taken. | Yes |
| Person has symptoms of COVID-19 (no LFD taken) | Yes |

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| --- | --- |
| **Scenario** | **PCR needed?** |
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| LFD is positive. Person did not have symptoms of COVID-19 when the LFD was taken, but then symptoms develop during the isolation period | No\* |
| LFD is positive. Person had symptoms of COVID-19 when the LFD was taken. | No\* |
| LFD is negative. Person had symptoms of COVID-19 when the LFD was taken. | Yes |
| Person has symptoms of COVID-19 (no LFD taken) | Yes |

\* unless needed for one of the four reasons listed above

**Frequently ask questions**

1. **Do children in primary schools and early years settings still have the option to follow the local enhanced guidance for household contacts?**

The local enhanced guidance for household contacts of positive cases remains in place and continues to be reviewed every 2 weeks.

This offers parents and settings an alternative to daily LFD testing, which might work with their particular circumstances.

Household contacts in primary schools who choose to stay at home and then do a PCR test on day 5 do not need to do daily LFD testing as well.

1. **What should we do if parents report that they can’t get hold of LFD test kits?**

If this is an issue, we suggest the following stepwise approach:

1. Ask parents to persevere in trying to get hold of LFD tests. The online portal releases test kits in batches, so if there are none available, continue to try every couple of hours.
2. Many pharmacies have supplies, which are replenished daily. Parents should try and access tests via their local pharmacy where they can.
3. If no kits are available online, or via pharmacies, parents should ask family and friends if they have any spare tests. No family should leave themselves without test kits, but people are encouraged not to stockpile.
4. Schools may want to contact other local education settings to see if any spare kits can be shared.
5. Schools should ensure they keep their own supplies in-stock by regularly ordering more via the schools LFD testing online portal.
6. If all these routes fail, and a setting has an outbreak, please email the Education Infection Prevention Control (EIPC) team for further advice and support.

Daily LFD testing for close contacts is guidance only and cannot be enforced. This means that anyone who does not want to (or is not able to) participate in LFD testing does not have to. If they don’t carry out LFD testing, there is no requirement for them to isolate instead, and they may continue to attend their education setting provided they do not display any symptoms of COVID-19.

1. **If a child (aged 5 years or over) is a member of a group that is likely to have mixed closely, and there are multiple cases in that group, do they need to keep re-starting another 7-day LFD testing period every time someone new tests positive?**

Anyone who is contacted by NHS Test and Trace and identified as a close contact of a positive case should follow their advice.

However, if a child (aged 5 years or over) is a member of close contact group where there are multiple cases, and they have not been contacted by NHS Test and Trace, we suggest the following approach:

* Daily LFD testing should commence from the date of contact with the first positive case in the close contact group. This should continue for 7 consecutive days, or until 10 days after their last contact with the person who tested positive if this is earlier. This is not mandatory but is strongly encouraged.
* Children are not required to extend this daily testing period if additional people in the close contact group test positive. However, if parents are willing to extend the daily testing period, and there are enough LFD tests available, they are able to do so.
* In an outbreak situation, this guidance my vary, and settings should discuss testing advice with the EIPC team.

1. **What do I do if someone decides to get a PCR test after testing positive on LFD, and their PCR result is negative?**

If the negative PCR test was taken more than 2 days after the positive LFD test, the person should continue to complete a full isolation period.

If the negative PCR was taken within 2 days of the positive LFD test, you should contact the EIPC team who will support you with a risk assessment and provide further advice.

1. **I have an unvaccinated member of staff who was in close contact with someone now isolating following a positive LFD. The positive person has not registered their result, so my member of staff has not been contacted by NHS Test and Trace. Do they need to isolate?**

If you have a member of staff who is unvaccinated and is identified as a close contact of a positive case in your setting, wherever possible, they should be asked to isolate for 10 days. Unvaccinated adults are advised to isolate because they are more likely to pass the virus on to others than vaccinated adults.

However, there is no legal obligation for them to isolate (unless told to do so by NHS Test and Trace), so if the member of staff does not want to isolate, they can choose not to, but should be aware of the increased risk this may pose to others in the setting and steps should be taken to mitigate the risk (during what would have been the 10-day isolation period). This should include:

* Carrying out daily LFD tests before coming into work each day
* Wearing a face covering in the setting wherever possible
* Keeping 2 metre distance from others in the setting where possible
* Ensuring spaces being occupied are well ventilated
* Increasing handwashing.

1. **I have tested positive for COVID-19. On day 6 of my isolation, I have done an LFD test and the result is positive. I have registered this result and have now received a message from NHS Test and Trace to say I need to start a 10-day isolation period. Is this correct?**

No, if you register a positive LFD test result during your isolation period, you do not need to re-start your isolation period. These notifications are being caused by a glitch on the NHS COVID-19 app and Test & Trace system. It should hopefully be rectified soon. If you are unsure about any notifications received, please contact the EIPC team.

1. **Should we advise people to swab their throat AND their nose when using LFD tests?**

People are advised to follow the instructions in their LFD test kit. If it is a nasal swab only test kit, we do not encourage people to swab their throat as well. This is because these products are not licenced to be used in this way.

1. **Does the Omicron variant cause a mild illness?**

Evidence from the [UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investigation-of-sars-cov-2-variants-technical-briefings) suggests that in general, the risk of hospital admission with the Omicron variant is much lower than that for the Delta variant.

However, on an individual basis, the risk of severe disease depends on several factors, such as vaccination status, age, and comorbidities. In addition, even if a small proportion of people with Omicron develop severe disease, case numbers are currently so high that this small proportion could translate into a relatively big number. It is therefore still important to keep measures in place to reduce the risk of spread.

Crucially, we know that vaccines appear to provide a good level of protection against hospitalisation with the Omicron variant, especially for those who have received their booster.

1. **What symptoms should prompt people to get a PCR test?**

We know that people infected with COVID-19 report a variety of symptoms. These can include runny nose, headache, sneezing, sore throat, persistent cough, fever and a loss of taste and smell.

However, these symptoms are not specific to COVID-19, and they can also be caused by a number of other common viral infections.

As such, the [national guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection) still recommends that only people with one of the three main symptoms (a new continuous cough, a high temperature and a loss of taste or smell) should get a PCR test (unless they have already taken an LFD test and the result was positive).

The national guidance also says:

“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.”

1. **Can people be re-infected with COVID-19?**

Yes. We know that the Omicron variant largely evades the immunity built up by previous COVID-19 infections, meaning that the risk of re-infection is higher than it was in the past.

This is why people who have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 90 days are no longer excluded from routine LFD testing.

1. **How does COVID-19 spread?**

People can become infected with COVID-19 through one of three ways:

* breathing in air when close to an infected person who is exhaling small droplets and particles that contain the virus.
* small droplets and particles that contain the virus landing on the eyes, nose, or mouth, especially through splashes and sprays like a cough or sneeze.
* touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the virus on them.

You will find more information about these three modes of infection in the transmission risk tool guide on the [council website](https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/coronavirus/education.asp). Each mode of infection can be interrupted by different mitigation measures. These include good respiratory hygiene, handwashing, cleaning of surfaces, physical distancing, mask wearing and ventilation. This highlights the importance of having a combination of measures in place.