

PSNC Briefing 022/20: NHS Test and Trace – Key points for contractors as Q&As

PSNC has been working with NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) to clarify how the Government’s NHS Test and Trace programme applies to community pharmacy to help reduce the need for large numbers of pharmacies needing to close.

This briefing provides further information on the programme, gives advice on patient and staff contacts, and outlines the relevant mitigations that may help to avoid the need for whole pharmacy teams to self-isolate if one member tests positive for COVID-19. It will be updated if and when more information becomes available.

What is Test and Trace?

- On 27th May the Government introduced the [NHS Test and Trace service](#) to ‘help to control the rate of reproduction (R), reduce the spread of the infection and save lives’ and allow the Government ‘to go as far as it is safe to go in easing lockdown measures’. The service aims to **test** those with COVID-19 symptoms and **trace** those with whom they have been in contact and ask **close contacts** to self-isolate for 14 days.

Do the existing rules on self-isolating continue to apply?

- The existing rules apply for those who have COVID-19 symptoms, who should self-isolate with other members of their household. Pharmacy staff as essential workers can order a priority COVID-19 test.



What happens if a pharmacy staff member tests COVID-19 positive?

- A staff member who receives a positive COVID-19 test result should be included in NHS Test and Trace and receive a phone call requesting they complete an online form - to provide their details and those of their contacts. [Click here for more information.](#)

- Contract tracers dealing with community pharmacy are likely to be one of the (approx. 3,000) nationally employed healthcare professionals (Tier 2) but could be from the (approx. 20,000) call handlers (Tier 3). They will contact the pharmacy, to seek help gathering more information about contacts during the staff member's infectious period (broadly 48 hours before and the time after symptoms appeared). Contractors should respond promptly to requests for information.
- Contact tracers are seeking to trace other staff members who have been in **close contact** with the person who has tested positive for COVID-19, to ask them to self-isolate for 14 days.

What is a close contact?

- A **close contact** broadly means spending 15 minutes or more within 2 metres of an infected person, or a very close specified personal interaction for a shorter period of time, e.g. skin to skin physical contact or travel in the same small vehicle, and applies to those who spend significant time with an infected person within the same household.

Can I provide personal data about pharmacy staff?

- Data protection legislation permits this, for example, names and contact details, where it supports necessary and appropriate action, and this includes NHS Test and Trace.

How do I minimise the effect of NHS Test and Trace on the pharmacy?

- If pharmacy staff in the pharmacy are:
 - more than 2 metres socially distancing (from other staff and patients and the public) (from 4th July 2020 this is likely to change to the 1 metre plus rule) or
 - routinely wearing a Type IIR facemask on a sessional basis (Type IIR facemasks help to protect the wearer as well others if used properly) and
 - the contractor takes other appropriate measures...

...there is unlikely to be a close contact and, therefore, staff are unlikely to be asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

- Contractors should take other appropriate measures to help to protect staff, patients and the public, for example, physical barriers such as screens between pharmacy staff and patients and the public, appropriate information posters, COVID-safe arrangements for staff lunch and other breaks and handwashing routines undertaken frequently. Contact tracers may still ask about these steps and whether facemasks have been used (put on, taken off and disposed of) properly. See the PSNC risk assessment template (on our PPE, staff safety and security page) for an assessment of the pharmacy and click here for information on individual assessments for each member of staff (the NPA is preparing a template for use by its members).
- The use of full personal protective equipment (PPE) - Type IIR mask, apron, and gloves - is necessary in appropriate circumstances as detailed in the NHSE&I community pharmacy SOP to help to protect the wearer and avoid a **close contact** for the purposes of Test and Trace.

What if the pharmacy disagrees with the contact tracer's decision?

- If you disagree with an assessment or an identification of a **close contact**, or you ask to speak to the contact tracer's supervisor, your case should be escalated. The Public Health England (PHE) local Health Protection Team (Tier 1) will investigate cases escalated from Tier 2.

What about close contacts outside the pharmacy?

- Staff who have **close contacts** with those outside the pharmacy may be asked to self-isolate for 14 days, but generally this will not affect other pharmacy staff unless they subsequently test positive for COVID-19.

If staff are asked to self-isolate for 14 days, can they get tested?

13. Currently, if staff are close contacts and asked to self-isolate for 14 days, they are eligible for a COVID-19 test if they have symptoms of COVID-19. [Healthcare staff may be tested where there is a clinical need to do so](#) and if they test negative should follow the advice of the Health Protection Team.

What if I have had a positive antibody test?

14. This is likely to make no difference to your assessment under Test and Trace. [Government guidance](#) indicates that 'a positive antibody result signifies previous exposure, but it is currently unknown whether this correlates with immunity, including protection against future infections'.

Do contractors have responsibilities as employers?

15. Yes, clearly contractors have responsibilities as employers, for example under health and safety legislation. Contractors should make workplaces as safe as possible, [encourage staff to heed any notifications and to self-isolate as advised by contact tracers](#); they should also provide support to staff in isolation.

What happens if there is a COVID-19 outbreak?

16. Local Public Health teams are developing or have developed local **outbreak** control plans, for notification procedures for **outbreaks** and some have notified community pharmacy contractors of these plans. An **outbreak** is defined as 2 or more cases (suspected and /or confirmed) linked in place/time. Generally, contractors should notify NHSE&I regional teams/Regional Incident Coordination Centres of any outbreaks in their pharmacies.

What if the pharmacy has to close temporarily?

17. If the provision of pharmaceutical services is interrupted temporarily, this may be for a short period of time, for a deep clean of the premises, or a longer period of time if all staff are asked to self-isolate and no replacement pharmacy team is available. NHSE&I should be contacted and flexibility in the provision of pharmaceutical services sought in accordance with the emergency procedures which remain in place until at least 1st September 2020. [Click here for more information.](#)
18. A pharmacy that has to close temporarily should follow its business continuity plan and liaise with the local pharmacies that patients are likely to go to instead to have their prescriptions dispensed. PSNC's [emergency closure checklist](#) developed with NHSE&I provides a useful checklist of steps to take if the pharmacy is closing.

If one or more pharmacies have to close in an area, how will the provision of pharmaceutical services be maintained?

19. If maintaining the provision of pharmaceutical services in an area may be difficult, contractors should liaise with each other and NHSE&I, to seek to ensure patients receive the essential medicines they need. [Click here for more information.](#)

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information please contact [Gordon Hockey, Director of Operations and Support](#).