

CRITICAL WORKER EXEMPTION - MONDAY JULY 19TH

- As of August 16th, individuals with two vaccinations will not need to self-isolate if contacted by NHS Test and Trace.
- Before this date, in order to protect the delivery of public services, a very limited number of named critical workers will be informed that they are considered to have a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend work if they are contacted.
- This will only apply to workers who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-second dose) and is solely for the purpose of going to work.
- These critical workers will however still need to take a PCR test followed by daily LFD tests, and if they test positive they must immediately self-isolate. Measures will also need to be taken to ensure affected workplaces are Covid secure.
- Decisions to inform an employer that designated critical workers are considered to have a reasonable excuse to attend work will be made by the relevant government department responsible for that critical service
- There will not be a general application process - this is a specific and limited approach only to ensure continued delivery of critical services.
- Those operators of critical services should get in touch with their relevant government department leads for further information on how to apply for exemptions. Guidance on who to contact if a new stakeholder will be provided in the coming days.
- If employers are deemed by the government to be covered by this process, they will receive a letter from a government department informing them and telling them what steps they and the relevant critical workers must follow.
- It remains crucial that those who have a positive Covid test immediately isolate for the full amount of time, and update their T&T Covid-19 app accordingly.

Q. What has been announced?

To protect the delivery of public services a very limited number of named critical workers will be informed that they are considered to have a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend work if they are contacted. This will only apply to workers who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-second dose) and is solely for the purpose of going to work.

To mitigate the risk of increased transmission, certain conditions must be followed. Critical workers covered by this policy will need to take a PCR test followed by daily LFD tests. If they test positive they must immediately self-isolate. Measures will also need to be taken to ensure affected workplaces are Covid secure.

Decisions to inform an employer that designated critical workers are considered to have a reasonable excuse to attend work will be made by the relevant government department with responsibility for the critical service. Businesses are asked to get in touch with their relevant government department if they wish to apply for an exemption. Guidance on who to contact if a new stakeholder will be published in the coming days.

If deemed eligible, the employer will receive a letter from that government department informing them and telling them what steps they must follow.

This is a short-term and highly focused measure intended to apply only in exceptional circumstances with the core purpose of preventing significant harm to public welfare as a result of disruption to critical services.

Q. How many people will this exemption apply to?

Firstly, this is not an exemption. Departments will be notifying employers that in their view the reasonable excuse provision in the current regulations is likely to apply to designated critical workers given the need to prevent significant harm to public welfare as a result of disruption to a critical service.

This will only apply to a very narrow cohort of critical workers. The criteria are deliberately restrictive in order to maintain self-isolation as an effective tool against the spread of COVID-19.

If deemed eligible, employers covered by this process will receive letters from a government department informing them and telling them what steps they and the relevant critical workers must follow.

Unless your employer has a letter from a government department on which you are specifically named, this policy does not apply and you must self-isolate as directed.

Q. Can my employer make me go to work?

No. If you have been asked to self-isolate the process will not exempt you from that requirement. It will mean that, if your attendance at work is considered essential for the delivery of a critical public service, your employer may be given confirmation that it is reasonable for you to attend work rather than self-isolate, subject to a number of risk mitigations.

Given the essential nature of the services involved we would expect that individuals will want to consider, in the context of safety measures that can be put in place, what is best for them, their colleagues, and the people who depend upon the service they provide.

Q: What do employers of critical workers need to do?

Before seeking permission to take this approach, employers of critical workers should consider other steps that could be taken should workers be required to self-isolate, including:

- Providing cover with other existing staff or temporary staff
- Deferring non-urgent tasks
- Making reasonable alternative provision (for example buying in pre-packed sandwiches if a work canteen is closed)

Where agreement has been given by the relevant Government department for named individuals in critical roles to leave self-isolation to go to work, they and their employer will need to agree to a number of controls to minimise any risk of transmission. These will be set out clearly in a letter from the relevant Government department and will include an initial PCR test and daily LFD testing.

Q. Why is it not more people?

Self-isolation is an essential tool for suppressing the transmission of the virus. As it stands today, cases in England are rising by 32% week on week. Hospitalisations and deaths are rising too, though thankfully not at the same rates as in previous waves.

People who have been identified as contacts are at least five times more likely to be infected with COVID-19 than other members of the public. While vaccines are highly effective at reducing the risks of serious illness such as hospitalisations and deaths, vaccinations only provide ~79% protection against symptomatic disease after two doses. Therefore, even those who are fully vaccinated may still become infected, including with asymptomatic infection, potentially passing the disease onto others.

Q. Why is it certain sectors only? Why is hospitality/the arts not included?

We recognise that hospitality / the arts are important parts of our economy and way of life. But this is not a blanket exemption for any sector. This is a small and targeted intervention to ensure that services critical to the safety and functioning of our society can continue. This means enabling individuals to attend work where not doing so would lead to 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, and/or attend work where not doing so would result in significant impact on national security, national defence, or the functioning of the state.

It is essential that, where these exceptional circumstances do not apply, people continue to self-isolate when instructed to do so in order to prevent the spread of the virus in their workplaces and wider society.

Q. Will this apply to ministers/civil servants?

No. Government ministers will continue to self-isolate as required like everyone else.

This will not generally apply to civil servants. There may be very exceptional circumstances where it may apply for an individual civil servant who is unable to work from home and their absence from work would lead to disruption to the delivery of a critical service.

Q. How can I apply for an exemption?

There will not be a general application process - this is a specific and limited approach only to ensure continued delivery of critical services.

Those operators of critical services should get in touch with their relevant government department for further information on how to apply for exemptions. Guidance on who to contact if a new stakeholder will be published in the coming days.

Q. How often this is going to be reviewed?

This process is only intended to be in place until 16 August. After this date, close contacts who are fully vaccinated will not be required to self-isolate. Instead they will be advised to take a PCR test.

Q. Where can I find out more?

Press notice: [Fully vaccinated critical workers to be able to leave self-isolation in exceptional circumstances - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/press-releases/2021/07/19/fully-vaccinated-critical-workers-to-be-able-to-leave-self-isolation-in-exceptional-circumstances)

Further guidance will be shared with relevant businesses in the coming days.

MONDAY JULY 19TH PRESS NOTICE

Fully vaccinated critical workers to be able to leave self-isolation in exceptional circumstances

Fully vaccinated critical workers to be able to leave self-isolation in exceptional circumstances under new plans to prevent serious disruption to vital public services.

Railway signallers and air traffic controllers are among the critical workers who may in exceptional circumstances be able to leave self-isolation to attend work if deemed a close contact under new plans to prevent serious disruption to vital public services.

From today, in exceptional circumstances - where there would otherwise be a major detrimental impact on essential services - a limited number of critical workers may be informed by their employer, following advice from the relevant government department, that they may be able to leave self-isolation to attend work.

This is a small and targeted intervention to ensure that services critical to the safety and functioning of our society can continue. This means enabling individuals to attend work where not doing so would lead to 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, and/or where there is an immediate risk to defence or security.

This will only apply to workers who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-final dose) and will be solely so that they can attend work. They will otherwise need to continue to self-isolate as directed by NHS Test and Trace. It applies to asymptomatic contacts only and not individuals who have tested positive or who have Covid-19 symptoms.

Critical workplaces that take this approach will follow conditions to minimise any risk of transmission. Critical workers who attend work in these exceptional circumstances will need to take a PCR test as soon as possible followed by daily LFD tests before attending work each day of their self-isolation period. If they test positive or start to show symptoms they must immediately self-isolate and will no longer be able to attend work.

Workplaces will follow other safeguards, including ensuring that social distancing is maintained and face coverings worn at all times.

Decisions to inform employers that designated critical workers may have a reasonable excuse to attend work will be made by the relevant department with responsibility for the critical service.

This is a short-term measure before the exemption for fully vaccinated contacts is introduced on 16 August. It is highly limited and focused to prevent public harm from disruption to critical services. It will only apply to named individuals from a specific set of organisations. If deemed eligible, employers covered by this process will receive a letter from a government department setting out the designated critical workers and telling employers what steps they and those critical workers must follow.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

“Throughout this global pandemic, critical workers across the country have been doing the extraordinary by delivering vital services – from policing the streets to keeping our transport links open.”

“These individuals form the backbone of many of our most vital services and, as we learn to live with this virus, it’s right we do everything in our power to protect services from disruption by allowing our fully vaccinated critical workers to keep doing their important work.”

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fully-vaccinated-critical-workers-to-be-able-to-leave-self-isolation-in-exceptional-circumstances>