

Rapid testing – Information Sheet for Employers

WHAT IS RAPID TESTING AND WHO IS IT TARGETED AT?

To reduce the spread of coronavirus, Suffolk County Council is introducing rapid testing for people who cannot work from home but may be carrying the virus and not have any symptoms.

Rapid testing (also referred to as community testing or lateral flow testing) is a new tool to help identify and isolate individuals who have COVID-19, but do not have symptoms and may be spreading the virus to other people without knowing.

By having the test – which involves a swab of the nose and throat – results are available within approximately one hour. The tests enable us to identify people carrying the virus that we would not otherwise be able to find. Every positive individual detected who then self isolates for the recommended time can help stop the chain of transmission and prevent a potential outbreak in your workplace.

During lockdown, the testing is focused on individuals who are unable to work from home, who may be at greatest risk of contracting and spreading the virus.

WHY SHOULD I ENCOURAGE MY STAFF TO GET TESTED?

An estimated one in three people with coronavirus do not have any symptoms, which means an increased risk of spread going undetected. We have seen first-hand the impact of large outbreaks and large numbers of staff having to self-isolate throughout the pandemic, which can affect both productivity and business continuity.

Although the vaccine is coming it will take time before everyone is vaccinated. In the meantime, rapid testing is an important new tool for preventing the spread of the coronavirus and includes the following benefits to your business:

- Protects your employees' health and that of your customers
- Identifies cases earlier, reducing likely spread
- Minimises disruption to your business due to large numbers of staff needing to self isolate, and
- Provides your staff with free and easy to tests with results available quickly, minimising disruption to your business.

To find your nearest testing centre and to book an appointment

Visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/covid-19-asymptomatic-testing

Call: 0333 772 6144

WHAT DOES THE TEST INVOLVE?

Community testing uses a new test known as a Lateral Flow Test. The process involves the individual attending a testing site and taking a simple swab from the throat and nose. The swab is then processed at the testing site and the result sent to the individual within an hour via text or email.

ARE THE TESTS ACCURATE?

No test is perfect. The most accurate test we have for COVID-19 is the PCR test, which involves the swab being sent to a laboratory for analysis and is used for when people have symptoms. PCR test results can take a day or so to come back but are usually very accurate. This means that people can be reasonably confident in the outcome and continue to self-isolate if the result is positive.

Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) give a much quicker result (usually within an hour) but these tests are not as accurate as PCR tests. A negative LFD test is not a 100% guarantee that you do not have the virus. However, lateral flow tests tend to detect individuals in their most infectious period. As one in three people may have the virus and never get symptoms, this can be a useful tool to find extra cases of COVID-19 before the virus is passed on.

Evaluation of the LFD tests, compared to PCR tests, show LFD tests pick up between five out of 10 of the cases and nine out of 10 cases where the person has higher viral loads (amounts of the virus in the nose and throat), and are most infectious.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Because of this, people should continue to “act like they have the virus” even if their LFD test result is negative, ensuring that they continue to adhere to all the prevention of transmission guidance, including to wash their hands frequently, socially distance and wear face coverings. Also, this means regular testing is key, as if you are in contact with other people regularly, you could have caught the virus and started to pass it on, even if a recent test showed you are negative.

WHAT DOES THE TEST SHOW?

If someone tests positive at one of the community testing sites, they must self-isolate for 10 days. As of new guidance published on 27 January 2021, if someone has tested positive and is isolating, they no longer need to arrange for a further PCR test. (NB In a few specific cases, PCR tests may still be required. Please see the link below for the latest guidance.)

For those who are self-isolating, financial support may be available through the Government’s Test and Trace Support Payment scheme. The Suffolk “Home, But Not Alone Service” provides support for those who are classed as clinically extremely vulnerable. Suffolk Advice and Support Service is on hand to help with any financial, housing or debt enquiries.

If someone tests negative, the result only covers the moment in time when a test is carried out. Therefore, individuals must continue to follow COVID-19 guidance such as maintaining social distancing (that’s a 2metre distance between each other), regularly washing hands, working from home if possible and wearing a face covering where advised.

For the latest guidance, visit www.gov.uk/coronavirus

To find your nearest testing centre and to book an appointment

Visit: www.suffolk.gov.uk/covid-19-asymptomatic-testing

Call: 0333 772 6144

HOW OFTEN SHOULD PEOPLE GET TESTED

We recommend your staff get tested twice per week, three to four days apart. By getting into this routine, the risk of an infected person passing on the virus in the workplace is minimised.

HOW DO PEOPLE BOOK A TEST AND WHERE ARE THEY AVAILABLE?

There are two community testing centres open - at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich and University Centre, West Suffolk College, Western Way in Bury St Edmunds - available from 8am to 7pm, seven days a week. More centres are being planned across the county in major towns and villages over the forthcoming weeks.

To see the full list of locations, and to book an appointment, online visit:
www.suffolk.gov.uk/covid-19-asymptomatic-testing.

Bookings can also be made by telephone at **0333 772 6144**.

WHAT IS THE ASK OF BUSINESSES?

We are asking businesses to:

- Promote the testing offer to staff who are unable to work from home
- Provide some flexibility to allow staff to get tested, and
- Contact the booking line on 0333 772 6144 if you plan to send a number of members of staff for testing.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more about Suffolk's rapid testing project, to book an appointment and for regular updates

Visit: **www.suffolk.gov.uk/covid-19-asymptomatic-testing**

Call: **0333 772 6144**

For more information about lateral flow testing

Visit: **www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-lateral-flow-antigen-testing-for-people-without-symptoms**

OTHER USEFUL LINKS AND NUMBERS

- For more information about the Home, But Not Alone helpline, visit:
www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/home-but-not-alone
- Suffolk Advice and Support Advice provides free, confidential advice on issues such as finance, housing, debt and a range of other support. Find out more, visit: **www.suffolk.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/suffolk-advice-and-support-service**