

COVID-19 FAQs for Employees

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1. What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a virus called coronavirus.

2. What should I do if I think I have symptoms of COVID-19?

Staff who develop symptoms of COVID-19 must isolate in accordance with NHS guidance. Symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- high temperature
- new, continuous cough
- loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 you should get a test.

3. When should I self-isolate?

Staff must follow NHS advice and stay at home if you are required to self-isolate. Reasons to self-isolate include:

- you have any symptoms
- you've tested positive for coronavirus
- someone you live with has symptoms or tested positive
- someone in your support bubble has symptoms and you've been in close contact with them since their symptoms started or during the 48 hours before they started
- someone in your support bubble tested positive and you've been in close contact with them since they had the test or in the 48 hours before their test
- you've been told you've been in contact with someone who tested positive
- you arrive in the UK from a country with a high coronavirus risk

The [NHS website](#) includes full details of when you should self-isolate.

If you are required to self-isolate, you should report to the absence line on your first day of absence by calling 01752 434353 before 08.30am. Staff should leave a voicemail message including their name, line manager's name, and explain how long they are self-isolating for.

4. How long should I self-isolate?

The duration of the isolation period may vary dependent on the reason for the isolation. The durations of the isolation are available on the [NHS website](#).

5. Should I get tested for COVID-19?

All staff who have symptoms of COVID-19 are advised to get tested.

Staff who have symptoms of COVID-19 and require a test can obtain one by visiting the [Government website](#) or by telephoning 119.

6. Can I return to work if I receive a negative test result?

You may be able to return to work if:

- everyone you live with who has symptoms tests negative
- everyone in your support bubble who has symptoms tests negative
- you were not told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace
- you have not travelled to the UK from a place with a high coronavirus risk
- you feel well

If you have received a negative test result you should discuss this with your line manager.

Further information on your COVID-19 test result can be found on the [NHS website](#).

7. What happens if someone becomes unwell during work or attends work with symptoms of COVID-19?

Please refer to the Special Measures to Support Safe Working Practice for further information if someone becomes unwell during work. This can be found on the [PDSE website](#).

8. What should I do if I am at moderate risk from Coronavirus (clinically vulnerable)?

Staff who are in a moderate risk group as defined by the NHS should inform their line manager as soon as possible. This should be detailed within the staff members individual risk assessment. Reasonable adjustments will be considered and should be discussed with the line manager in order to find an appropriate solution. Further advice should be sought from Occupational Health if required. Staff who are required to attend work should still do so.

People who are at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) may include people who are over 70 years of age, people who are pregnant, or people who have a health condition that defines them as clinically vulnerable according to NHS guidelines.

9. What should I do if I am pregnant?

Staff should inform their line manager if they are pregnant. A risk assessment will be completed with the line manager. Social distancing must be followed at all times and reasonable adjustments will also be considered.

The NHS are advising that there is no evidence that pregnant women are more likely to get seriously ill from coronavirus, but they have been included in the list of people at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable) as a precaution. Further information from the NHS can be found on the [NHS website](#).

10. What should I do if I am at high risk from Coronavirus (clinically extremely vulnerable) or if I have been told I need shielding?

Clinically extremely vulnerable staff may be advised by the NHS that they should be shielding. You're only advised not to go to work if you get a letter advising you to shield. If you receive a shielding letter you must notify your line manager immediately.

The duration of shielding will depend on the advice from the NHS and the Government in relation to local and national restrictions.

Staff who are able to work from home should do so whilst they are shielding. You should speak to your line manager about your options if you are required to shield but cannot work from home.

When a period of shielding ends, you will be supported to return to the workplace and reasonable adjustments will be considered where necessary.

11. If I am required to self-isolate, would I be able to use annual leave or floating days to cover my absence?

Staff who are self-isolating will be paid their usual sick pay entitlements in accordance with their contract.

12. How much sick pay will I receive if I have to self-isolate?

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) is paid to all staff who are off sick or self-isolating due to COVID-19 as long as they meet the eligibility criteria. The rate for SSP is set by the government and is currently £95.85 per week.

Staff who have over 1 year of continuous service will be eligible for Occupational Sick Pay. The duration of this pay will depend on the length of continuous service. To find out more about your sick pay entitlements, please check your contract.

13. What happens if I am unable to attend work as I don't have childcare or if my child's school has closed?

Staff are entitled to take Carer's leave to look after their children if their child's school is closed and they are unable to make alternative childcare arrangements. Carer's leave is unpaid for staff on PDSE Ts & Cs.

If you are unable to attend work for this reason, you should ring the staff absence line to report your absence. Staff who are unpaid for Carer's Leave may be able to use floating days or annual leave subject to agreement from their line manager.

Staff who have difficulties with childcare should speak with their line manager to discuss their options. Staff may be able to take unpaid Parental Leave or make a request for flexible working in line with the Flexible Working Policy.

14. What measures will be put in place when staff are in the workplace?

We have devised a document outlining the overall framework of Special Measures to Support Safe Working Practice during COVID-19. An organisational risk assessment has also been completed for all sites.

All documents relating to COVID-19 are available on the [PDSE website](#).

15. Am I able to get tested for COVID-19 at work?

PDSE have introduced asymptomatic routine testing using lateral flow testing for all staff. This is in the form of self-testing kits to be administered at home, twice weekly.

If you wish to participate, please email PDSEHR@plymouth.ac.uk.

16. Can I work from home?

PDSE are regularly reviewing our guidance around who should attend work and who can work from home. Staff who predominantly work in clinical or patient facing roles should attend work. This may include, but is not limited to, the following staff groups:

- Dental Nurses
- Dental Administrators
- Decontamination Staff
- Team Leaders
- Central Administrators

Staff who can work effectively from home may do so provided that they are able to fulfil the duties of their role and there is no detrimental impact to the business. Staff who are working from home must have prior agreement from their line manager. This is now limited to staff who have a laptop issued by PDSE.

Staff who are working from home will be expected to attend the workplace if there is a task required that cannot be completed from home.

Staff who are unsure about whether they are required to attend work should discuss this with their line manager.

17. Are face-to-face meetings still taking place?

Face to face meetings should only take place where social distancing can be maintained, though Staff are encouraged to use video or telephone conferencing where possible. PDSE is working on providing appropriate IT solutions to enable video conferencing etc. between sites. Please speak to your line manager if you have any concerns.

Where a face-to-face meeting must go ahead, social distancing should be maintained and a well ventilated room should be used. Staff should take sensible precautions during meetings. For example, the sharing of items such as pens should be avoided.