

Manual Contact tracing Q&A 21 January 2021

Question 1 - what were the changes to the published guidance in mid-December? Did the guidance actually change, or was this just a clarification of existing guidance?

The publicly facing guidance on the definition of a contact was changed in the middle of December to bring the guidance into line with existing Public Health England (PHE) protocols. The scripts being followed by contact tracers already reflected the PHE definition of a contact.

Question 2 - has the script for contact tracing changed in the last 6 weeks, and if so, how?

The contact tracing scripts are updated regularly with any tweaks needed or to reflect any changes in policy. Scripts were updated in mid-December, for example, to account for the reduction in the self-isolation period for contacts from fourteen days to ten days.

From 14 December, on the advice of the four UK Chief Medical Officers, the self-isolation period for contacts has reduced from 14 days to 10 days. This decision was based on the scientific evidence, the stage of the epidemic and the expert clinical judgement of the Chief Medical Officers. The evidence shows a low likelihood of being infectious as a contact after 10 days. We constantly review the data and make changes when we are confident it is appropriate to do so.

Those testing positive for COVID-19 are legally obliged to self-isolate until 10 days after the onset of symptoms or, for people who did not have symptoms, 10 days after the date they were tested. Other members of their household are legally obliged to self-isolate until 10 days after the infected person first showed symptoms or took their test. Non-household contacts identified by NHS Test and Trace or local public health teams are legally obliged to self-isolate until 10 days after their most recent contact with the person who has tested positive. Contact tracers will always set out when an individual person's self-isolation period ends.

Question 3 - how are the Contact Tracers measured, and has this changed in the last 6 weeks?

The most recent published statistics show that for the week 31 December – 6 January, 92.7% of contacts were reached by contact tracers. There has been a notable increase in the number of close recent contacts identified each week over the last 6-week period. The proportion of contacts successfully reached has also increased.

	Current week	Approx trend	Previous week	Total ²
Contacts identified	736,939	↑	493,700	5,365,804
Contacts reached (all) ¹	92.7% (683,124)	↑	92.4% (455,950)	77.0% (4,129,409)
Contacts reached (as a percentage of those who had contact details)	95.9%	-	96.0%	87.5%
Close contacts for whom communication details were not provided, for cases not managed by local HPTs	3.4%	↓	3.9%	13.3%
Of contacts not managed by local HPTs who were reached, percentage reached within 24 hours of being identified as a contact	97.3%	↑	96.8%	87.5%

Question 4 - how do the Contact Tracers identify cumulative contacts, and over what period do they do this assessment?

In identifying contacts in conversations with positive cases, contact tracers will seek information on individuals that the positive case has been within 1 to 2 metres of for 15 minutes or more, and that any shorter engagements with the same individual should be added together over a 24 hour period.

Question 5: what is the situation for an individual who tests positive using a lateral flow device?

The current guidance for any individual testing positive using a lateral flow device is that they should immediately self-isolate and book on-line to have a confirmatory PCR test. Individuals testing positive from lateral flow devices are not currently fed into the contact tracing system. This guidance is currently under review.

Question 6: given the change in the risk threshold of the app, have the manual tracing questions also been updated to be more inclusive of risky contacts?

Changing the risk threshold of the app is a technical change to enable the app to identify a greater number of the individuals who have been within 2 metres of a positive case for more than 15 minutes. The threshold is set to balance the need to slow the rate of infection by identifying high-risk encounters whilst mitigating the risk that those at lower risk may be notified to self-isolate.

The scripts used by contact tracers are not affected by the change in risk threshold for the app.

Question 7: could we update the working group as and when changes to the guidance/scripts/app are made.

Changes to the app risk algorithm, either to change the relationship between these parameters, or include new ones, will be published. The risk threshold for the app may be changed as the app is updated, more data is available about the transmission rate of the virus, or due to behavioural factors.