

Confirmatory Testing Q&A 10 March 2021 v3

You can contact the Agri-food chain covid policy unit at Defra via email at: covid19.coordinationunit.agrifoodchain@defra.gov.uk.

Due to the high prevalence of coronavirus infections in England, confirmatory testing will be temporarily removed for LFT tests taken at workplace test sites until prevalence lowers again. This change was implemented on 27 January 2021.

When am I legally obligated to self-isolate?

You are legally obliged to self-isolate following a positive Lateral Flow Test (LFT) result. Please follow the latest government guidance on self-isolation.

Previously I was told I needed to take a confirmatory test after a positive LFT result. Why has this changed?

A positive LFT result is less likely to be a false positive the more COVID-19 there is in the population. At the moment, COVID-19 rates are high so an LFT is less likely to be a false positive than it would have been a few months ago when COVID-19 rates were a lot lower. For this reason, we currently do not require people who test positive on LFT tests to confirm their result with a PCR test.

How accurate is the LFT?

Antigen lateral flow tests are highly specific, which means that only a small proportion of people who do not have coronavirus will receive a positive result. Extensive clinical evaluation from Public Health England and the University of Oxford shows that lateral flow tests are appropriate for large-scale population testing, including for asymptomatic people.

How do I get my LFT result?

Your result will be available within 30 mins of taking the test. They are point of care tests, so don't need to go to a lab to be processed. Your result will be sent to you via SMS and/or e-mail. Results will be communicated at latest within a day of the test. You are legally obliged to self-isolate following a positive LFT result

Will people who test positive on one of these rapid tests face fines if they don't self-isolate? Will they be eligible for the £500 self-isolation payment?

LFT positive results legally confirm diagnosis of coronavirus and activate legal obligations to self-isolate and the ability to claim the Test and Trace Support Payment for those not self-reporting. Before this date, a confirmatory PCR test was required.

What if I take a PCR test after getting an LFT result and the result is different?

Your LFT result will be used for qualification for Test & Trace self-isolation payments, contact tracing and legal requirement of self-isolation, not a PCR result, unless you work in a care home, the NHS or at a primary school and have taken a test as part of an asymptomatic testing workplace programme in one of these settings.

What if I take two tests with different results?

- You should not be taking 2 tests **unless explicitly instructed to do so.**

- If your first LFT is negative and your second LFT is positive you must follow government self-isolation guidance from the result of the positive LFT.
- If your first LFT is positive and you take a second LFT which is negative, you must follow government self-isolation guidance from the result of the positive LFT. You cannot use one LFT to validate or invalidate another.
- If your LFT is positive and you take a PCR which is negative, you must follow government self-isolation guidance from the result of the positive LFT.
- If your PCR test is positive and you take a LFT which is negative, you must follow government guidance and self-isolate from the result of the positive PCR test.
- If your PCR test is negative and you take a LFT which is positive, you must follow government self-isolation advice from the result of the LFT.

What do you do with an inconclusive LFT result?

If your LFT result is invalid or inconclusive, you will need to take another as soon as possible.

How will contacts be traced from the LFT result?

Users can input their positive LFT result into the NHS app using a token ID from CTAS which would then trigger self-isolation and tracing. They can also register their test result online at gov.uk or use the phone number in the test kit's instructions.

Why is this change only happening in England and not in devolved administrations despite having similar prevalence?

This change will take effect in England only as of 27 January 2021.

Health is a devolved matter, and it is for each of the four nations of the UK to decide on their own testing policy.

Won't it mean people are less likely to come forward for LFD testing if a positive result places them under a legal duty?

It is essential that anyone who tests positive self-isolates immediately to protect their friends, family, colleagues and local community – and to help stop the spread of the virus and save lives.

As an employer, why should I participate in asymptomatic workplace testing if my staff don't have the opportunity of a PCR test to confirm they have the virus?

With higher incidence of COVID-19 in the general population, expert public health advice is that there is limited value in a confirmatory PCR test. Regular staff testing, with self-isolation for those who test positive, helps to protect other staff from getting the virus and helps to reduce overall absences from work.

Why do cross channel hauliers still need to do confirmatory PCR?

Several countries have introduced COVID-19 testing requirements for hauliers. The rules are different in each country. Check the rules before you travel and take the necessary action.

Additional Information:

Prevalence of infections throughout England on those tested are currently above 1% and are expected to remain at these levels for at least two months. PHE recommends that as COVID19 prevalence rates are above 1%, the performance (positive predictive value) of Innova LFTs and PCRs are broadly comparable for infectivity and expected to be indistinguishable when used at test sites, significantly reducing the need for routine PCR confirmatory testing.

At times of higher prevalence, the proportion of false positives will fall. While prevalence rates are above 1% LFTs and PCR testing have broadly comparable rates of false positives when testing for infectivity. For example:

- At 0.9% prevalence PCR PPV is 73% & LFD 71%, and 0.8% prevalence PCR PPV is 71% & LFD 68%
- At 1% prevalence PCR Positive Predictive Value (PPV - the probability that an individual, given a positive test result, really is infectious) is 75% and LFT PPV is 73%.
- At 2% prevalence PCR PPV is 86% while LFT is 85% when testing for infectivity.

Confirmatory testing was introduced to reduce the number of people self-isolating unnecessarily after receiving a false positive result from LFTs. This is because in areas of prevalence lower than 1%, there is a higher likelihood of false positive results.

In line with clinical advice, confirmatory PCR testing will remain for NHS England staff and in Adult Social Care, where results may be reported using a self-reporting tool by the individual or by their workplace. It will also remain for primary school teachers where testing is done at home, but not for secondary school teachers who take tests at school. Utilising confirmatory PCR in settings that use a self-reporting tool will minimise the risk that incorrectly reported positive results are registered. Confirmatory PCR testing will also be used for monitoring purposes, genome sequencing and for self-administered tests.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>