

## Coronavirus: request a reasonable excuse letter

**This process applies in England.**

Self-isolation remains an essential tool in our national efforts to reduce the spread of coronavirus. In the small number of situations where the self-isolation of close contacts would result in serious disruption to critical services, a limited number of named workers may be able to leave self-isolation under specific controls for the purpose of undertaking critical work only.

This process is only intended to run until 16 August 2021, when fully vaccinated close contacts will be exempt from self-isolation.

The process applies only to **named individuals who have been identified as close contacts and told to self-isolate at the time of the request**. It **cannot** be used to pre-emptively request reasonable excuse letters for staff in case they are told to self-isolate at a future date.

When providing a view on whether an individual would have a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend work, Defra will consider whether the individual works in critical elements of national infrastructure and whether their absence would be likely to lead to the loss or compromise of this infrastructure resulting in one or both of the following:

- 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
- significant impact on national security, national defence, or the functioning of the state

The process is exceptional for these specific circumstances. It is not intended to avoid all disruption to services that will result from the need for people to self-isolate.

Further guidance on NHS Test and Trace in the workplace and this process is available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

### Eligibility for a reasonable excuse

This will only apply to a very narrow cohort of critical workers. In Defra sectors, we currently expect that workers in the sub-populations and critical sites set out in **Annex A** may meet the above test. For the latest version of the list, please refer to the 'critical roles to be undertaken' section of the [request form](#)..

If you believe that individuals in your workforce meet the above test, but their roles are not on the list at Annex A, please follow the process set out below to submit a request. Defra will consider requests on a case-by-case basis.

This policy applies to **named** workers in specifically approved workplaces who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-final dose) and who have been identified as [close contacts](#). Having a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend work is contingent on following the controls set out below, agreed by the Department of Health and Social Care, to mitigate the risk of increased infection. This is **not** a blanket exemption for all workers in a sector.

The process applies only to workers who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-final dose) and will be solely for the purpose of attending work. Workers will otherwise need to continue to self-isolate as directed by NHS Test and Trace.

It applies to asymptomatic contacts only. It does not apply to any workers who have tested positive to coronavirus and should also not be used for contacts who develop symptoms regardless of their role or vaccination status. In these circumstances you should continue to self-isolate as now and follow relevant [guidance](#).

## Process

Where employers believe the self-isolation of certain key employees as contacts would result in serious disruption to critical services, they should complete the [online form](#) to request a reasonable excuse letter.

If you need more information or have a query about submitting this request form, please email [emergencies@defra.gov.uk](mailto:emergencies@defra.gov.uk).

If Defra considers that an individual has a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation for a period necessary to enable them to perform the critical tasks identified in the request, Defra will issue a letter confirming, subject to observance of the conditions set out in that letter, Defra's view in relation to named individuals. It is ultimately for those enforcing the legal duty to self-isolate to accept what is or is not a "reasonable excuse"; the purpose of the reasonable excuse letters being to demonstrate Defra's view.

It is Defra's expectation that employers will communicate Defra's response to individual employees covered by their request, taking into account their existing obligations under UK GDPR legislation.

## Conditions

Any reasonable excuse provision will apply **until the date specified on approval letters**. A further request will be required if the worker is required beyond the review date. To be eligible, the worker needs to meet a set of conditions that will be set out in the letter, including:

- a. Critical workers who attend work in these exceptional circumstances will need to continue to self-isolate until a negative PCR test result. It may be reasonable **if strictly necessary** to go to work before receiving the results of the PCR test, but only if the worker has taken an LFD test just before doing so and received a negative result.
- b. Critical workers would need to take daily LFD tests, report the results daily to the line manager and self-isolate immediately if they test positive.
- c. Any critical worker showing any Covid-19 symptoms, no matter how mild, will be required to self-isolate and get a new PCR test. The critical worker cannot go to work until they have had a new PCR test showing a negative result.
- d. Critical workers are only to leave self-isolation to attend - and travel to and from - work for specific, named purposes.
- e. Critical workers may, if strictly necessary, travel on public transport or with others to and from work but should wear a face covering at all times.
- f. Social distancing should be optimised and, wherever possible, maintained at all times in the workplace. Critical workers should limit the use of shared/common areas at work, such as canteens and staff rooms, as much as possible.

Please note that it will be the responsibility of employers to ensure, where applicable, that these controls have been met.

## **Annex A: List of critical sub-populations that may have a reasonable excuse to leave self-isolation to attend critical work, subject to the process set out above**

### Agri-food chain

- Manufacturing maintenance engineers, quality assurance technicians, and highly skilled supervisors, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Designated Health & Safety and Fire Marshalls at food processing, manufacture, and distribution sites, subject to all other mitigations being exhausted
- Official Vets, Meat Hygiene Inspectors, Poultry Health Inspectors, Environmental Health Officers and Certifying Support Officers necessary for preventing immediate risk to food safety or animal welfare in processing plants, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Quality assurance technicians, laboratory staff, line operators, process operators, technicians, by-product room operators, meat processors with Certificates of Competence, flour millers, feed millers, butchers, trained retail packers, and meat machine operators at primary processors, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Qualified Livestock Hauliers for primary processing, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Poultry catchers on farms, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Quality assurance technicians, laboratory staff, forklift truck drivers, loading bay/despatch bay staff (including specialist order pickers), line operators, process operators, and technicians at food manufacturing sites, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Forklift truck drivers and loading bay/despatch bay staff (including lollipers, shunters, and specialist order pickers) at retail distribution sites and wholesalers, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Specialist Reach Truck drivers, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted and only where the use of this type of truck is essential in the movement of critical goods
- Official Vets and Environmental Health Officers at Port Health Authorities/Border Control Points, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Official Vets and Certification Support Officers for food and animal product exports, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Official Vets for TB testing, subject to all other mitigations being exhausted

### Waste

- Staff essential to the removal and processing of healthcare, hazardous, or municipal waste, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Staff essential to the running of incineration plants, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Landfill operators, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted in a particular region or local area

### Water and wastewater

- Water engineers, staff/contractors working on repair of mains/supply interruption, chemical and technical specialists, emergency response practitioners, and control room staff whose immediate attendance at work is essential to maintaining critical services, all subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted

### Veterinary medicines

- Batch testing laboratory staff and Qualified Persons essential to the batch release of medicines, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Laboratory staff essential to the production of veterinary medicines, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted

### Veterinary practices

- Specialist veterinary workers in veterinary practices and at locations of large animals, farms, studs, etc. without whom there would be an immediate disruption to essential services, subject to all other mitigations being exhausted

### Incident response and prevention

- Government vets and Official Veterinarians responding to animal disease outbreaks or cases of serious animal health/welfare concern, subject to all other mitigations being exhausted
- Animal and Plant Health Agency animal health scientific laboratory staff, subject to all other mitigations being exhausted
- Laboratory managers and safety staff, technicians and veterinary investigations officers, animal technicians, veterinary surgeons and site security and maintenance staff at the Animal and Plant Health Agency research laboratory in Weybridge, subject to this being restricted to specialist staff whose absence would result in immediate disruption to essential services and all other mitigations being exhausted.
- Environment Agency staff operating the Thames Barrier and other critical flood defence assets, and Environment Agency staff on response teams in regional areas across the country to ensure effective protection of life and property in the event of a flood or other major incident, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted
- Navigation Authority staff whose roles/tasks include essential maintenance on assets with high consequence of failure and/or essential health and safety activity which mitigates risk of loss of life, subject to all other mitigation options being exhausted