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**Guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19**

**What to do if you have symptoms of a respiratory infection or have tested positive for COVID-19.**

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The General Guidance currently in use for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including Covid-19, is set out below but maybe subject to change going into the Autumn/Winter period.

In summary as at September 22nd 2023,

* There is no requirement for the public to test currently unless you are recognised under the “at risk criteria “and eligible for antivirals
* There is no requirement to provide a negative LFT before returning to work
* The guidance below gives clear expectation if you are unwell and what you should do with regards to working.

**Contents of the Guidance below-**

* [**Symptoms of respiratory infections**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#38154)
* [**What to do if you have symptoms of a respiratory infection**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#83765)
* [**What to do if you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#86588)
* [**Children and young people aged 18 and under who have symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#86590)
* [**What to do if you test positive for COVID-19**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#89817)
* [**What to do if you are a close contact of someone who has had a positive test result for COVID-19**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#83767)
* [**If you took an NHS lateral flow test**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#99564)
* [**Employment and staying at home**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#83769)
* [**Financial support if you cannot work**](https://www.gov.wales/guidance-people-symptoms-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#94422)

**Symptoms of respiratory infections**

Respiratory infections can spread easily between people. It is important to be aware of symptoms so you can act to reduce the risk of spreading your infection to other people.

Symptoms can include:

* continuous cough
* high temperature, fever or chills
* loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell
* shortness of breath
* unexplained tiredness, lack of energy
* muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise
* not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry
* headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual
* sore throat, stuffy or runny nose
* diarrhoea
* feeling sick or being sick

**What to do if you have symptoms of a respiratory infection**

* Get plenty of rest and drink water to keep hydrated.
* Use medications such as paracetamol to help with symptoms. Antibiotics are not recommended for viral respiratory infections because they will not relieve symptoms or speed up recovery.
* Stay at home and avoid contact with others until you no longer have a high temperature or until you feel better. You could ask friends, family, or neighbours to get food and other essentials for you.
* Work from home wherever possible. If you cannot work from home, talk to your employer about options.
* If you've been asked to attend a medical or dental appointment in person, tell them about your symptoms.
* Tell people you have recently been in contact with that you're feeling unwell. This means they can be aware of signs or symptoms.
* If you are concerned about your symptoms, they are worsening, or you can no longer manage at home, seek medical advice by contacting your GP or NHS 111. In an emergency dial 999.

**What to do if you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19**

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

* a high temperature (37.8°C or above)
* a new continuous cough
* loss or change of taste or smell

If you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19, you should stay at home and follow the guidance above for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection.

Most people in Wales can no longer access free testing for COVID-19. [**Testing is still available to specific groups**](https://www.gov.wales/get-tested-coronavirus-covid-19). If you wish to test but are not eligible for free lateral flow tests (LFTs) you can purchase them from various retailers.

**Children and young people aged 18 and under who have symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19**

Respiratory infections are common in children, particularly during the winter months.

For most children and young people, these illnesses will not be serious. Very few become seriously unwell. This is also true for children and young people with long-term conditions. However, some children under 2 can become more seriously unwell from a[**respiratory condition called RSV**](https://www.gov.wales/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-and-bronchiolitis). This includes those born prematurely or with a heart condition.

Attending education is important for children and young people’s development, health and well-being. The long-term impact of missing education should not be underestimated.

Children and young people with mild symptoms can continue to attend their education setting. Mild symptoms include a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough, in children who are otherwise well.

They should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing and/or sneezing. They should wash their hands after using or disposing of tissues.

Children and young people who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home. They should avoid contact with other people where they can. They can go back to their setting when they no longer have a high temperature and are well enough to attend.

It can be difficult to know when to seek help if your child is unwell. If you are worried about your child, especially if they are aged under 2 years old, then you should seek medical help.

Free COVID-19 tests are no longer available for most people and they should follow the above advice if they experience symptoms. However, for those people who can access free NHS tests or who choose to purchase tests privately, they should follow the below advice.

**What to do if you test positive for COVID-19**

**Stay at home and avoid contact with other people**

* Work from home if you can. If you cannot work from home, talk to your employer about your options.
* If you've been asked to attend a medical or dental appointment in person, let them know about your positive test result.
* You should let everyone in your household know about your positive COVID-19 test result. COVID-19 is infectious for up to 2 days before you begin to feel unwell, or the date of your test. Therefore, you should tell anyone you had close contact with during this time. This means they can be aware of signs or symptoms. You may wish to ask friends, family or neighbours to get food and other essentials for you.

Many people with COVID-19 will no longer be infectious after 5 days. You should therefore avoid contact with other people for at least 5 days after the day you took your test, or from the day your symptoms started (whichever was earlier).

Some people may be infectious for up to 10 days from the start of their infection. You should therefore try and avoid meeting [**anyone who is at higher risk**](https://gov.wales/covid-19-treatments) of becoming seriously unwell for 10 days after you took you test or started to have symptoms.

If you are concerned about your symptoms, they are worsening, or you can no longer manage at home, seek medical advice by contacting your GP or [**NHS 111**](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/SelfAssessments/symptomcheckers/COVID19.aspx?locale=en&term=A). In an emergency dial 999.

**If you have to leave your home when you’re unwell**

If you have to leave your home, try to do this as safely as possible. The following actions will reduce the chance of passing on your infection to others:

* consider wearing a well fitted face mask
* avoid crowded places such as public transport, large social gatherings, or anywhere that is enclosed or poorly ventilated
* do not go to places where you know there will be people who are at higher risk from COVID-19 such as hospitals and care homes
* take any exercise outdoors in places where you will not have close contact with other people
* cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
* wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose and before you eat or handle food
* avoid touching your face

**How to reduce the spread of respiratory infection including COVID-19 in your household**

People who live in the same household as someone with a respiratory infection, including COVID-19, are at the highest risk of becoming infected. This is because they are most likely to have prolonged close contact. People who stayed overnight in the household of someone with COVID-19 while they were infectious are also at high risk.

If you have an infection, there are things you can do to help prevent it spreading to others in your household:

* keep your distance from people
* ventilate rooms you are in by opening windows and leaving them open for at least 10 minutes after you have left the room
* wash your hands regularly and cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
* regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, like door handles and remote controls, and shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms
* consider wearing a well fitted face mask. This is particularly important if you live with someone with [chronic health conditions or with a weakened immune system](https://www.gov.wales/covid-19-treatments)
* Tell anyone that does need to come into your home that you've tested positive or that you have symptoms of a respiratory infections, so they can protect themselves. They can do this by wearing a face mask, keeping their distance if they can, and washing their hands regularly

**What to do if you are a close contact of someone who has had a positive test result for COVID-19**

People who live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 are at the highest risk of becoming infected because they are most likely to have prolonged close contact. People who stayed overnight in the household of someone with COVID-19 while they were infectious are also at high risk.

If you are a household or overnight contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, it can take up to 10 days for your infection to develop. It is possible to pass on COVID-19 to others, even if you have no symptoms.

You can reduce the risk to other people by taking the following steps:

* pay close attention to the main symptoms of COVID-19. If you develop any of these symptoms, you are advised to stay at home and follow the guidance for people with symptoms above
* avoid contact with anyone you know who is at higher risk of becoming severely unwell if they are infected with COVID-19. People with a weakened immune system are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, despite vaccination
* do not visit a care home if you have been a close contact of a positive case of COVID-19 in the last 10 days. On any other occasion, please follow the [care home guidance for visitors](https://www.gov.wales/node/39144)
* work from home if you are able to do so
* limit close contact with other people indoors
* consider wearing a well fitted face mask if you do need to have close contact with other people, or you are in a crowded place
* wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitiser
* if you develop symptoms of any respiratory infection, try to stay at home. Avoid contact with other people and follow the guidance for people with symptoms

You should follow this advice for 10 days after being in contact with the person who tested positive.

If you are a contact of someone with COVID-19 but do not live with them or did not stay in their household overnight, you are at lower risk of becoming infected. You do not need to follow all of the advice. However, you should pay close attention to the main symptoms of COVID-19. If you develop any, you are advised to stay at home and follow the guidance for people with symptoms.

**If you took an NHS lateral flow test**

If you took an NHS lateral flow test, you should [**report your result on GOV.UK**](https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result) if you haven’t done so already - you can also do this by calling 119 (only if positive).

You cannot report a result on GOV.UK (or by calling 119) more than 24 hours after taking the test. You cannot report a result from a paid-for test on GOV.UK or by calling 119.

**Employment and staying at home**

Businesses, employers and event organisers should consider the risks associated with COVID-19 in the same way as they do for all other communicable diseases (for example flu and norovirus). They are no longer legally required to conduct a specific coronavirus risk assessment.

We advise all businesses, employers and event organisers to continue to implement effective [public health control measures](https://www.gov.wales/public-health-guidance-employers-businesses-and-organisations-coronavirus). These will help protect workers, contractors, visitors and customers from exposure to and spread of coronavirus. The most effective way of preventing the spread of any communicable disease in any premises is to prevent the virus being present in the first place.

Staff should stay at home if they are showing symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19 or do not feel well enough to go to work. They should not return to work for up to five days if they test positive for COVID-19, in order to prevent the virus spreading to others.

Employers should consider what action they should take if a staff member is displaying any symptomsof a communicable disease (such as flu, coronavirus or norovirus) or have tested positive for coronavirus. What is reasonable will depend on a number of factors, including whether it is feasible for the work to be carried out from home (also see the public health advice above on working from home).

Wherever possible, Welsh Government would encourage employers to discuss and agree any changes to absence management with the workforce and with trade unions prior to any changes being implemented.

**Financial support if you cannot work**

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You should tell your employer if you’re unwell and have symptoms of a respiratory infection such as COVID-19 and do not feel well enough to go to work. You may be covered by their sick leave or special leave policy.

If you cannot get sick pay from your employer, you may be able to get Statutory Sick Pay from the 4th day of your sickness absence.

Find out more about [Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) on gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay).

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