



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care

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By email to: shine.brownsell@psnc.org.uk

19 November 2020

Dear Leyla, Malcolm, Mark and Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 8th October raising your concerns about the impact of NHS Test and Trace on the community pharmacy sector.

The Test and Trace service which we launched on 28 May brought together testing, contact tracing and outbreak management into an end-to-end service.

The more rapidly we can identify people who may have been at risk of infection and, if necessary, tell them to self-isolate, the more effectively we can reduce the spread of the virus and maintain transmission at low levels. Before a vaccine can be found to beat COVID-19, both social distancing and contact tracing are critical to controlling the spread of the virus and are being used around the world.

We understand that some pharmacies are being severely impacted by the need for staff to self-isolate. We can confirm that pharmacy staff involved with the provision of pharmaceutical services are eligible for priority testing.

If a member of the community pharmacy team has been in contact with a COVID-19 positive case outside of work they must follow the self-isolation [guidance](#).

It is important to maintain a COVID-19 secure environment throughout the working day by following Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) [guidance](#), including maintaining social distancing, working behind screens, regular handwashing and wearing appropriate PPE. Thought should also be given to staff rest breaks and minimising the possibility of transmission at this time. These are all issues I know many of you have responded positively to and dealt with, but I feel worth repeating here.

If contact occurs between someone with confirmed coronavirus infection and a health care worker in the course of their clinical duties and when they are wearing fully appropriate PPE, the healthcare worker would be considered to not to have been exposed and would not be recommended to isolate.

This would apply to any health care professional for example community pharmacists and their teams when providing pharmaceutical services and when wearing appropriate PPE, provided the standards for PPE (both the type used and practice in its use) conform to the standards expected in health care settings. The management of staff and healthcare settings can be found in the [guidance](#).

Due to the strength of our PPE supply we are ensuring many millions of PPE items reach healthcare providers on the frontline, including community pharmacies, through the PPE portal and other distribution routes. The order limits on the PPE portal have now increased so that eligible providers can order PPE to meet the increased need for PPE arising from the pandemic, free of charge, for the PPE items available to the sector through the portal. This need is classed as the PPE that providers are required to use over and above business-as-usual use, due to COVID-19 infection control guidance, rather than what would have been used pre-pandemic. While such requirements will vary according to settings, contexts and individual circumstances, the order limits on the PPE Portal, which incorporated feedback from the PSNC, can serve as an indicative approximation, especially where providers may be in doubt.

As of today (19th November), over 7,900 pharmacies have registered to use the portal and, up to and including the 15th November, over 7 million items have been shipped through the PPE Portal to pharmacies, free of charge. This includes aprons, gloves, type IIR masks, visors and hand hygiene. I would strongly encourage any community pharmacy that has not already registered for the portal to do so. The latest guidance for the portal is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ppe-portal-how-to-order-emergency-personal-protective-equipment>.

If a member of the pharmacy team tests positive and there is a risk to the provision of pharmaceutical services and it is clear that full consideration has not been given to relevant mitigations in place, then advice regarding the individual circumstances should be sought from the local [Health Protection Team](#) (specific individual circumstances will be considered and advice may therefore appear to differ). You should also contact your NHS England and NHS Improvement Regional Office regarding possible disruption to provision of pharmaceutical services.

Individuals do not need to self-isolate if their test is negative, as long as:

- Everyone they live with who has symptoms tests negative.
- Everyone in their support bubble who has symptoms tests negative.
- They were not told to self-isolate for 14 days by NHS Test and Trace or the NHS COVID-19 App – if they were, see [what to do if you've been told you've been in contact with someone who has coronavirus](#).
- They feel well – if they feel unwell, they should stay at home until they're feeling better.

I know you and the pharmacy sector will understand the importance of self-isolation, which since 28th September has become a legal requirement.

We are currently developing a pilot to trial PCR testing provision in community pharmacy settings, with the aim to improve local access to testing and overcome some accessibility barriers. This pathway will initially target the symptomatic population eligible for testing.

However, no symptomatic individuals will be encouraged to attend a pharmacy (a representative will collect and drop off the kit in lieu) and pharmacies will not conduct or register tests. We are grateful for the PSNC's input into the development of the pilot and will keep you updated as this work progresses.

I hope this information addresses the concerns you raised. It has been incredibly important for me to hear, first-hand, from those representing the NHS working on the front line with patients throughout the pandemic. So please do continue to raise any issues that you are facing, or indeed opportunities where pharmacy teams can continue to support patients, with me through my office at psp@dhsc.gov.uk.

I do also want to take this opportunity to say thank you again to all of the community pharmacy sector who have worked tirelessly, not only during this pandemic, but day in and day out, providing a vital service to the communities they serve. That is why it is so important we continue to work and engage with you and hear of your concerns.

Kind regards,



JO CHURCHILL