Minister sets out scale of contact tracing operation

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Testing and contact tracing will play a central role in unlocking the Coronavirus lockdown in Northern Ireland, Health Minister Robin Swann has emphasised.

Everyone who develops Covid-19 symptoms is urged to book a test without delay.

The Minister has spelt out the scale of the NI contact tracing programme, which is being built for the long-term.

"The programme launched by the Public Health Agency was extended in recent weeks to cover all new cases of infection. The full service is now operational," Mr Swann stated.

"My Department has also now published its [Test, Trace and Protect strategy](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/Test-Trace-Protect-Support-Strategy.pdf),
setting out our approach in detail. This is a major long-term programme, given the continuing threat from Covid-19 and the potential for local clusters and outbreaks of infection as we move out of the current phase of our response.**

"We will be scaling up the current contact tracing provision to include teams recruited directly to staff the operation. This will include

professionals such as nurses and Environmental Health Officers for contact tracing with lead clinicians and health protection consultants advising on complex situations and local clusters or outbreaks. The work will be supported through the deployment of trained volunteers when required.

"There will also be a call centre element to this service which will be able to provide general information to symptomatic individuals and their contacts on a range of Covid-19 issues.

"Digital tools will also be developed to complement the telephone based contact tracing. Options are under active consideration.

"Test, Trace and Protect will help release the lockdown, keep people safe and protect our health service. Everyone has to play their part. That means getting tested early when we have symptoms, helping contact tracing by providing details of contacts, and self-isolating when advised in order to protect others."

Anyone with a new, continuous cough, a high temperature or a change in their sense of smell or taste is asked to immediately report these symptoms and book a test at nhs.uk/coronavirus
(https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/)

Everyone over the age of five years with symptoms of COVID-19 is now eligible for testing. Testing can be booked directly on the above web address or by ringing 119. People with symptoms can be tested at one of the four drive through test centres in Belfast, Londonderry, Craigavon, or Enniskillen, or via a postal self-test kit which will be dispatched to their home.

If you test positive, you must continue to self-isolate for 7 days from the onset of symptoms. You can complete your isolation at the end of 7 days if your condition has improved and you have not had a temperature for 48 hours. If your test is negative, you and other household members no longer need to isolate.

Anyone who tests positive for coronavirus will be contacted by the Contact Tracing Service in the Public Health Agency, and will need to share information about their recent interactions. This could include household members, people with whom they have been in direct contact, or been within 2 metres for more than 15 minutes.

People identified as having been in close contact with someone who has had a positive test must stay at home for 14 days, even if they do not have symptoms, to stop unknowingly spreading the virus. This is because people without any symptoms can spread the infection.

All information discussed with the Contact Tracing Service will be handled with appropriate privacy and confidentiality safeguards. The telephone number used by the service currently comes up as a 'withheld number', so if you do have symptoms and are being tested, please expect a call from the Contact Tracing Service.

The PHA Contact Tracing Service will signpost to support services of assistance to help people who need to self-isolate.

Notes to editors:

1. How test, trace and protect works:

Part 1 FOR SOMEONE WITH CORONAVIRUS SYMPTOMS:

* **STEP 1 ISOLATE:** As soon as you experience coronavirus symptoms, you should **self-isolate for at least 7 days**. Anyone else in your household should self-isolate for 14 days from when you started having symptoms.
* **STEP 2 TEST:** You should order a coronavirus test immediately at nhs.uk/coronavirus or call 119 if you have no internet access.
* **STEP 3 RESULTS:**

If your test is positive you must complete the remainder of your 7-day self-isolation, and have had at least 48 hours without fever. Anyone in your household should also complete self-isolation for 14 days from when you started having symptoms.

If your test is negative, you and other household members no longer need to isolate.

- **STEP 4 SHARE CONTACTS:** If you test positive for coronavirus, the PHA will call you within 24 hours with instructions of how to share details of people you have been in close, recent contact with and places you have visited. It is important that you respond as soon as possible so that we can give appropriate advice to those who need it.

Part 2 FOR THOSE CONTACTED IF YOU HAVE BEEN IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WITH CONFIRMED CORONAVIRUS

- **STEP 1 ALERT:** You will be alerted by the PHA if you have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus, The alert will come by a phone call from the PHA, the number may come up as 'withheld'.

- **STEP 2 ISOLATE:** As a close contact you will be asked to self-isolate for up to 14 days, depending on when you **last** came into contact with the person. It's really important to do this even if you don't feel unwell, because it can take up to 14 days for the symptoms of infection to develop. This will be crucial to avoid you unknowingly spreading the virus to others. If you have no symptoms, your household doesn't need to self-isolate with you, but they must take extra care to follow the guidance on social distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene

- **STEP 3 TEST IF NEEDED:** As a close contact if you develop symptoms of coronavirus, other members of your household should self-isolate at home and you should book a coronavirus test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or call 119 if you have no internet access.

If your test is positive you are then a case of infection and you must continue to self-isolate for 7 days.

If your test is negative, you must still complete the full self-isolation period for close contacts which is 14 days.

2. The strategy can be accessed on the Department's website (https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/Test-Trace-Protect-Support-Strategy.pdf).

3. For media enquiries please contact DoH Press Office
by email: pressoffice@health-ni.gov.uk (mailto:pressoffice@health-ni.gov.uk). Out of hours
please contact the Duty Press Officer on 028 9037 8110.

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