

Testing of close contacts of positive COVID-19 cases

A description of contact testing and the potential benefits

Contact testing is the testing of those people who are close contacts of a confirmed positive case of coronavirus (COVID-19). Contact testing is an effective mechanism to improve identification of positive COVID-19 cases and help to break the chains of transmission.

Daily contact testing (DCT) as an alternative to self-isolation is offered to employees at organisations that have been approved for the Workplace DCT scheme. From 16 August 2021, policy changed such that only unvaccinated adults need to self-isolate if identified as a contact of a confirmed case – DCT is therefore most relevant to this group.

Individuals taking part in Workplace DCT take daily tests using rapid lateral flow devices (LFDs) for 7 days (or to the end of their self-isolation period). Individuals without any symptoms who test negative each day are able to attend work and carry out some essential activities. If they have symptoms or test positive, they must self-isolate.

DCT trials

Since December 2020, DCT has been piloted in the NHS and other workplaces to assess its use in the work setting. During 2021 research trials were undertaken in schools and with the general public to determine the effectiveness and safety of DCT.

1. Daily contact testing in workplaces

A summary of [DCT testing in workplaces](#) can be found online.

2. Evaluation report from pilot of daily contact testing in NHS trusts

[Evaluation report from a pilot of daily contact testing in NHS trusts](#), completed in 2021.

3. Schools daily contact testing: outcomes from a randomised controlled trial

Study outputs from a recent randomised controlled trial of the use of DCT in schools:

- Press release (July 2021): [Daily contact COVID-19 testing for students effective at controlling transmission in schools, University of Oxford](#)
- Report (The Lancet): [Daily testing for contacts of individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection and attendance and SARS-CoV-2 transmission in English secondary schools and colleges: an open-label, cluster-randomised trial, The Lancet](#)
- Report (Oxford university website summary): [Daily testing for contacts of individuals with SARS-CoV-2 infection and attendance and SARS-CoV-2 transmission in English secondary schools and colleges: an open-label, cluster-randomised trial, Experimental Medicine Division \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)

- Qualitative results: [Feasibility and acceptability of daily testing at school as an alternative to self-isolation following close contact with a confirmed cases of COVID19: A qualitative process analysis](#)

4. Independent data review

A [review of the pilots by 3 independent academics](#) was commissioned by NHS Test and Trace with the primary objective of ensuring that the data collected had not been interpreted with an optimism bias.

5. DCT General Public Study: outcomes from a randomised controlled trial

Study outputs from a recent randomised controlled trial of the use of DCT in the general public:

- [main paper](#)
- [supplementary material to main paper](#)
- [qualitative paper](#)

Policy statement (last updated December 2021)

Since the home daily contact testing study was launched, the success of the vaccination programme has allowed us to make significant changes in our response to COVID-19. Since 16 August, the great majority of contacts are no longer required to self-isolate, provided they are fully vaccinated (or unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons) or under 18. Contact testing policy is kept under review and the results from the trials and pilots will be used to inform future policy.

Our main focus remains on promoting uptake of the vaccine and the booster roll out.