

Fully vaccinated critical workers to be able to leave self-isolation in exceptional circumstances

Railway signallers and air traffic controllers are among the critical workers who may in exceptional circumstances be able to leave self-isolation to attend work if deemed a close contact under new plans to prevent serious disruption to vital public services.

From today, in exceptional circumstances – where there would otherwise be a major detrimental impact on essential services – a limited number of critical workers may be informed by their employer, following advice from the relevant government department, that they may be able to leave self-isolation to attend work.

This is a small and targeted intervention to ensure that services critical to the safety and functioning of our society can continue. This means enabling individuals to attend work where not doing so would lead to 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, and/or where there is an immediate risk to defence or security.

This will only apply to workers who are fully vaccinated (defined as someone who is 14 days post-final dose) and will be solely so that they can attend work. They will otherwise need to continue to self-isolate as directed by NHS Test and Trace. It applies to asymptomatic contacts only and not individuals who have tested positive or who have Covid-19 symptoms.

Critical workplaces that take this approach will follow conditions to minimise any risk of transmission. Critical workers who attend work in these exceptional circumstances will need to take a PCR test as soon as possible followed by daily LFD tests before attending work each day of their self-isolation period. If they test positive or start to show symptoms they must immediately self-isolate and will no longer be able to attend work.

Workplaces will follow other safeguards, including ensuring that social distancing is maintained and face coverings worn at all times.

Decisions to inform employers that designated critical workers may have a reasonable excuse to attend work will be made by the relevant department with responsibility for the critical service.

This is a short-term measure before the exemption for fully vaccinated contacts is introduced on 16 August. It is highly limited and focused to prevent public harm from disruption to critical services. It will only apply to named individuals from a specific set of organisations. Employers covered by this process will receive a letter from a government department setting

out the designated critical workers and telling employers what steps they and those critical workers must follow.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Throughout this global pandemic, critical workers across the country have been doing the extraordinary by delivering vital services – from policing the streets to keeping our transport links open.

These individuals form the backbone of many of our most vital services and, as we learn to live with this virus, it's right we do everything in our power to protect services from disruption by allowing our fully vaccinated critical workers to keep doing their important work.