

Seasonal workers to receive free Covid-19 tests on farms

The government has today (29 March) called on employers of seasonal agricultural workers to help keep the nation safe and restrict the spread of Covid-19 by registering for free workplace testing.

This follows [the introduction of a new bespoke testing regime for international arrivals](#) this weekend, which extended the supply of free Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests to employers of seasonal agricultural workers in the edible horticulture sector. These workers play a vital role across many of our farms, picking fruit and vegetables and helping to feed the nation.

Under this new bespoke testing regime, international arrivals who are in the country for longer than two days will be required to take a test before the end of day two and to take a further test every three days – typically on days five and eight. Those who receive a positive test result will be required to take a further PCR test for variant surveillance.

Seasonal agricultural workers will be able to access these tests through several routes, including home tests and community testing sites. They should remain on the farm for the 10 days after they arrive, except where necessary to access testing.

Employers of seasonal agricultural workers who register for workplace testing can now access free tests to help meet this testing requirement, which will protect growers from having to take on the greater costs of regular PCR testing, which could save an estimated £10m for growers across the country.

[Farming Minister Victoria Prentis has written to employers of seasonal workers today](#), encouraging them to take up this offer and register to deliver regular testing of their workers. Around 1 in 3 people with coronavirus don't have symptoms, so workplace testing will help to identify individuals who may be carrying the virus without knowing it, and allow employers to take the necessary action to stop the virus spreading amongst their workforce.

Writing to growers across the country today, Farming Minister Victoria Prentis said:

I am immensely grateful for the resilience our growers have shown throughout the last year, meeting the challenges of the pandemic and going above and beyond to help keep the nation fed.

Now, as we look towards resuming a more normal way of life, we must stay vigilant and do what we can to ensure we continue to operate as safely as possible.

Regular testing protects businesses, helps keep workers safe and is vital to our continuing recovery. I urge our farmers and growers to work with us to protect their workforces, their businesses and our food supply.

The tests can be carried out at a designated workplace site, and for businesses of over 10 people, employers can dispense those tests for staff to take at home. If positive results come back, staff must take swift action to isolate and undertake a confirmatory Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test.

In addition, those overseas looking to work within the edible horticulture sector will be able to undertake the mandatory two week quarantine period on the farm, meaning they can carry out certain tasks under Covid-safe conditions during that time. This has already proved to be vitally important for the sector, with government taking action to ensure that pickers were able to get straight to work gathering last year's harvest.

Employers must register for the programme by the 12 April to receive a supply of free test kits until the end of June.