



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP  
Secretary of State for Environment,  
Food and Rural Affairs

Seacole Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

T 03459 335577  
[defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk](mailto:defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk)  
[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

2 March 2021

To the businesses keeping the nation safe and fed,

The last year has presented the greatest health challenge this country has faced in our lifetime, and our vital services and industries have had to rally when they were most needed. I've been enormously proud of the efforts I've seen among our food businesses and retailers, our water and waste services and so many more in keeping our communities safe and fed. I want to once again extend my thanks to your industries, upon whom we have all depended.

We now have a roadmap to open up our communities and restart our lives, but we need to remain vigilant and continue to protect our sectors and the workforce as we go forward. That means taking all necessary precautions to reduce the risk of transmitting the infection in the workplace. Employers have a vital role to play in this next phase, minimising the spread of infection among those who cannot work from home by introducing regular testing for asymptomatic staff.

Now is the time for employers to adopt the Government's workplace testing programme, with the tests being provided free of charge.

We do not yet know the impact of the vaccine on transmission of the virus, and it may still be possible to pass on Covid-19 to someone else even after vaccination. This makes testing of asymptomatic employees in the workplace all the more important, as it allows organisations to identify potential outbreaks and respond at speed, keeping staff safe and preventing further disruption. Providing the tests is quick and easy, and results are received rapidly. Employers should be aiming to test staff members twice each week.

More and more businesses are registering for the programme each day, and have been quick to recognise the confidence and resilience that workplace testing provides. Staff have welcomed the security that they won't put their families at unnecessary risk in carrying home infections that could have been prevented – even after the vaccination programme is complete a significant proportion of the population will remain vulnerable to infection, some of whom will also be vulnerable to severe disease and death.

The programme of free tests is open to all employers of over 50 staff and will run until 30 June, but you must register by 31 March. Further testing options are also available for organisations falling under the 50-person threshold. You can sign up [here](#) or email my officials at [Covid-19.WorkforceTesting@defra.gov.uk](mailto:Covid-19.WorkforceTesting@defra.gov.uk) with any queries. We can also

provide you with further guidance and examples of where the testing scheme has already been successfully adopted in businesses similar to your own – please do get in touch.

Our food, drink and environmental services industries have proven themselves the hidden heroes of the pandemic, and we will continue to depend on those organisations to operate as smoothly and as safely as possible. My thanks again for your vital role as we continue our national recovery.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George Eustice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**THE RT HON GEORGE EUSTICE MP**