

## Government announces end to all Covid restrictions in England

**On 21 February 2022 the government published its strategy on 'Living with Covid-19' with changes to self-isolation rules coming into force in England as early as this week, we consider the implications for employers.**

- From Thursday 24 February 2022 there will no longer be a legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive test for Covid-19, fully vaccinated individuals and under 18s will not be told to test themselves for 7 days after coming into contact with a positive case and unvaccinated close contacts will also not be legally required to isolate.
- However, until 1 April 2022 people will continue to be advised to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days if they test positive for Covid. After 5 days they may choose to take a lateral flow test followed by another the next day, if both tests are negative and they do not have a temperature, they can return to their normal routine. From 1 April 2022 the government will update guidance setting out the steps people with Covid-19 should take to minimise contact with other people.
- From 24 February 2022, employees will not be legally obliged to tell their employers when they are required to self-isolate. This means that employers who want to contractually require employees to inform them when they are required to self-isolate will need a clear and robust policy on self-isolation.
- The £500 payment to support people to self-isolate will be removed from 24 February 2022. People who were instructed to self-isolate before this date will still be able to claim support payments within the next 42 days.

### Covid SSP rules to end in March 2022

Covid Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) rules will stay in place until 24 March 2022. From that date, SSP will no longer be payable from day 1 if people are unable to work because they are sick or self-isolating due to Covid and pre-pandemic SSP rules will apply. People who are off sick with Covid will still be able to get SSP if they qualify, as it will be treated like any other sickness, but only from day 4.

#### Did you know?

Employers should inform staff of the changes to SSP entitlement and update their sick pay policies. Some employers may want to offer company sick pay to encourage employees to self-isolate.

### Government confirms end of free Covid tests

From 1 April 2022, free Covid testing will end for the general public; limited symptomatic testing will remain available for a small number of at risk groups and free symptomatic testing will remain available to social care staff. The government will work with retailers to allow people to buy tests if they want to. A box of 7 lateral flow tests is expected to cost around £20.

#### Did you know?

To ensure the workplace remains safe, employers may want to consider making it a contractual requirement for employees to take regular Covid tests and provide the outcome of them.

### Covid jabs to be extended to 5-11 year-olds

The Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid has announced that 5-11 year-olds are to be offered a Covid jab on a non-urgent basis during April 2022, to protect against the low risk of serious illness in this age group. Employers should consider how they will manage time off requests and pay entitlements for parents who wish to accompany their child to a vaccine appointment.

#### Did you know?

There are no statutory rights to time off in this situation, but employers should check their contractual terms so these can be followed and be mindful of any custom and practice.

Employers should communicate with staff regarding the changes to self-isolation rules and consider how they will continue to keep the workplace safe, particularly for those most vulnerable to Covid-19. Contact our 24-hour Advisory Service for up-to-date guidance on this and more.

Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this publication.