

Seasonal Agricultural Workers in Scotland - PCR Testing Approach

April 2021

Stakeholder support pack – PCR testing on Scottish farms

The purpose of this document is to provide Scotland's agricultural industry with accurate and factual information about the Covid testing measures being implemented on farms to maximise public health protection, minimise the risk of Covid outbreaks and to enable the farms to continue food production operations.

It explains the rationale for the approach, including the use of Polymerase Chain Reaction tests for workers travelling to Scotland from abroad, and provides key information for both employers and employees about why the approach is critical in protecting public health and the importance of workers participating.

It also provides information and links to online resources and organisations providing support for staff who are unable to work because they need to self-isolate due to a positive test or because they have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive.

This is the first version of the support pack. An updated version will follow shortly which contains additional information, website links and resources to explain the context for the testing approach, as well as step by step information about how to take a PCR test.

Any queries about the information in the pack should be sent to covid-19.policy.media@gov.scot. This also includes specific requests for additional details to be included in future versions.

What are we doing?

In line with existing public health measures for all international travellers coming to Scotland, people arriving from outside the UK to work on farms need to go into self-isolation for 10 days.

The measures require all workers to be tested for Covid-19 on days two and eight of self-isolation so that new strains of coronavirus can be identified quickly and effectively to protect public health on the farms and in the wider community.

In Scotland, both Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests and Lateral Flow Device tests are already widely used. PCR tests are more effective at identifying positive cases and will be used on farms to quickly and effectively identify anyone who has Covid-19.

The decision to use PCR tests and not also LFD tests on Scottish farms has been developed with the agricultural industry and with the most up to date clinical and scientific advice.

The approach is designed to protect public health by finding cases quickly and breaking the chains of transmission so that cases do not increase and lead to outbreaks. Finding cases quickly keeps workplaces safe, protects staff and keeps farms open so that food stocks are maintained.

Where positive cases do occur, guidance is clear on the steps that staff and employers need to take. Effective support mechanisms are in place both to advise farms and to help workers to access the financial assistance which is available to them if they cannot work because they need to self-isolate.

Why is this happening?

The Covid-19 testing approach in Scotland focuses on frontline services and key industries, developing and adopting measures which protect public health and reduce the risk of outbreaks.

The food production industry is a key part of Scotland's economy and food supply system, and the role of seasonal agricultural workers is key within that system. This testing approach enables a key workforce to travel to and work in Scotland so that the fruit and vegetable sector can operate effectively during its peak production period.

Fruit and vegetable production is not only an important part of Scotland's economy (£144.2M in 2019) but it is also a major part of the UK food supply chain.

This testing approach is about making sure there are robust public health measures in the farm workplaces and in the living environments of the workers. If the approach is adopted successfully on all farms in Scotland it offers significant protection to wider local communities and the rest of Scotland from the risk of Covid-19 outbreaks and also new variants.

PCR testing is already in use across Scotland and the rest of the UK. In other areas of testing, if someone tests positive with an LFD test then they must have a follow-up PCR test to confirm that they currently have Covid-19. For farms in Scotland, workers are required to take two PCR tests during their self-isolation period – the first on day 2 and again on day 8.

Why is this happening?

As Scotland progresses towards summer and restrictions are eased, people move around much more. As this happens, getting testing continues to be crucially important in identifying cases and breaking transmission chains to prevent outbreaks. The breaking of transmission chains is key to continuing to reduce restrictions.

PCR tests are more effective at identifying positive cases, making them particularly well suited to use in workplace or industry setting including food production.

Objectives of Testing Approach



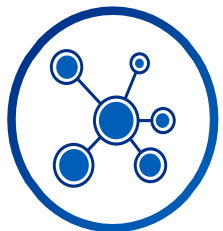
Protect

Those at highest risk, and to prevent transmission in high-consequence settings



Find

Positive cases to help reduce transmission in workplaces and prevent outbreaks in the wider community



Enable

Easing of restrictions and economic activities, including key industries

Purpose:

- Reduce R rate by identifying positive cases quickly to prevent wider infection and break the chain of transmission
- Enables food production industry to operate, supports workforce and gives confidence to the wider public as restrictions are eased

The technology:

- PCR test – Polymerase Chain Reaction test looks for the genetic material of the virus
 - Requires a lab result
 - High sensitivity helps to effectively identify positive cases
 - Results available in 48 hours without the need for a second test straight away
 - Safe and already widely used

Key messages for employers

- Work is underway to implement legislative changes so that it is a legal requirement for agricultural workers coming to Scotland from outside the UK to take two PCR tests while in self-isolation. This is designed to strengthen public health measures, protect workers and their colleagues, the environments they are working in and local communities.
- Businesses and employees who take part in testing are playing their part in vital efforts to defeat Covid-19, keep communities and Scotland safe.
- The requirement for international travellers to self-isolate and undergo testing has been in place for all travellers across the UK since February 2021.
- Not everyone who has coronavirus will have symptoms so it is important that employers understand the testing approach and act responsibly, ensuring their staff understand why the tests are required and take part.
- By finding cases quickly and effectively, you are helping to break transmission chains and prevent outbreaks. Asking people to self-isolate with the proper support in place means that your farms can continue food production.
- Using PCR testing on Scottish farms has been developed with the agricultural industry, representative bodies and drawing on the latest clinical and scientific advice.

Key messages for employers

- By ensuring that the people you are employing understand the approach and participate, you are helping to keep them and the wider communities near your farms safe.
- Support is available for workers who test positive and need to self-isolate. Information can be found at: www.nhsinform.scot or by contacting the National Assistance Helpline on 0800 111 4000 or Textphone on 0800 111 4114. See also <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolation-factsheet/>.
- Staff can also get extra help from the RSABI seasonal workers helpline on 0300 111 4160. This service is designed specifically for your workers and has translators, it is open Monday – Friday: 17.00 – 20.00 Sat/Sun: 10:30 – 14.00.

Key messages for workers

- If you are a seasonal agricultural worker, you must self-isolate for 10 days and you must take two Covid-19 tests during this time – the first on day 2 and again on day 8.
- To work on farms in Scotland you have to take a Polymerase Chain Reaction, or PCR, test. These are already testing people in Scotland and are safe and easy to use. They are also more effective at finding positive cases quickly than other types of test.
- You must self-isolate if you test positive or you are told by the NHS Test and Protect team that you are a close contact of someone else who has tested positive. **NHS Test and Protect makes the decisions on who must self-isolate, no one else.**
- You must follow FACTS in Scotland. This means wearing a face mask, avoiding crowds, keeping a 2m distance away from other people, washing your hands regularly and self-isolating immediately if you have symptoms, or have a positive test result.

Sources of support

- NHS Test and Protect can provide translated services to positive cases and close contacts if needed. This can be requested in the initial call from them.
- Financial support is available to help you if you are told you have to self-isolate.
- You can also call the RSABI Seasonal workers' helpline on 0300 111 4160. This is a helpline specifically for agricultural workers and has people who speak your language. It is open Monday to Friday: 17.00 – 20.00 Sat/Sun: 10:30 to 14.00. This helpline can also help you if you are worried about money, accommodation or your work in general.
- You can get help at www.nhsinform.scot or by phoning the National Assistance Helpline on 0800 111 4000 or Textphone on 0800 111 4114. You can read more at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolation-factsheet/>.

Background information for workers

- You must take part in Covid-19 testing to help break the chains of transmission and help keep your workplaces and your colleagues safe and to allow the farm to stay open to produce food.
- The test you take is called a PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) test. It works by looking for genetic material of the virus.
- The rules on self-isolation and taking two Covid tests apply to all people coming from outside the UK, not just seasonal agricultural workers.
- The Scottish Government has developed this approach with your employers and Scotland's agriculture industry to help keep farms and your workplace safe and to reduce the risk of Covid-19 outbreaks.