

# Revenue & customs briefing

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## Members' Briefing REVENUE & CUSTOMS GROUP

To: **All Members**

cc: **Branch Secretaries, Group Executive Committee, Equality Chairs, VOAC** (for info)

Can this Briefing be circulated via HMRC IT systems: **NO**

Website: **YES**

Action to be taken: **For the attention of all members**

Date: **5 May 2020**

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### COVID-19

#### **'Should I get a swab test and what happens if I do?'**

- *Testing for Covid-19*
- *'Tracking and Tracing'*
  - *Staying safe*

As key workers, HMRC staff who are exhibiting symptoms of Covid-19 can now [apply for a swab test](#). Additionally, if you are exhibiting symptoms, you may be asked by HMRC to apply for a swab test.

#### **'Track and Trace'**

PCS Revenue & Customs Group supports the testing programme; and we believe it needs to be linked to a mass 'tracking and tracing' programme. This means that as well as people who test positive isolating for a period, members of their household and those who have been in contact with them at work should also be tested.

Those who test positive should also isolate, as should their close families. Their close contacts should be tested – and so on. All this serves to identify the path taken by the virus and therefore reduces the spread.

Once you have been tested, you should notify HMRC about the test and the result. You should also notify the NHS, which [you can currently do via the NHS website](#), pending the roll-out of the new 'NHS App' currently under trial.

#### **What if you test 'positive'?**

If you test positive, you have the virus. You and your household should [follow NHS advice on self-isolation](#) along with the appropriate [medical treatment](#).

The test isn't fool-proof, so even if you test negative, it's possible you might still have the virus, as some results can produce a "false negative" (effectively, the test result is wrong). Tests you do yourself at home are the most unreliable, as obviously, medical staff are trained to do the swab properly.

If you develop the symptoms, you should behave as if you have the virus, and [follow the NHS guidelines](#). This means you should self-isolate for 7 days from when you first show the symptoms; and if someone in your household exhibits those symptoms, you should self-isolate for 14 days, or for a minimum of 7 days from when you first show the symptoms (whichever is longer).

**Public and Commercial Services Union – Revenue and Customs Group**

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**‘Anti-bodies testing’**

The above advice relates to the ‘swab test’, to see if you have the virus. A different test will be released at some stage, which will test for anti-bodies. This will tell you if you’ve had the virus. PCS will issue further advice when that test is rolled-out.

**Staying safe**

There is a real danger of a ‘second wave’ of the virus, which could be worse than the first wave, so PCS believe that where you can work at home, you should keep doing so. This will keep you safer, by avoiding both public transport and close contact with colleagues at work. Everyone will benefit from this approach, not just you and other HMRC staff but the whole country – given that it’s HMRC staff that are implementing the essential Job Retention/Self-employment Income Support schemes. HMRC should continue the telephony trials, allow everyone to work from home if they can, and provide the equipment you need to comply with display screen workstation law when working at home, such as suitable chairs etc.

Both nationally with the Cabinet Office, and departmentally with HMRC, PCS will carry on discussing how we can continue to keep you safe during the crisis.

**How we work in the future**

PCS are continuing to discuss with the department, the fact that what the virus has shown is that the department can still operate – even take on entire new workstreams – with three-quarters of its workforce based outside the office.

We’ll continue to argue that the short-term benefits of you working from home during the Covid-19 crisis (keeping you safe from infection) and the long-term benefits of that flexible approach (reducing the risk of future redundancies arising from the location strategy) are in everyone’s interests.

**Get involved!**

Remember, HMRC applies restrictions on the content of union circulars distributed using the department’s email system, so make sure that you stay in touch with your union.

If you haven’t already done so, let PCS have your personal/non-work email address and your mobile phone number. We’ll only use it to keep you informed about PCS matters. You can update your details securely online by registering for [PCS Digital](#) or by contacting [membership@pcs.org.uk](mailto:membership@pcs.org.uk). Alternatively, ask your local PCS rep to enter your details securely on the PCS Organising App.

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