

Dear Sir / Madam

First of all, thank you for everything you are doing to help keep Northumberland safe.

Whilst things are relatively quiet in the county from a COVID-19 perspective at this time, the situation can change very quickly and we should be in no doubt that we remain in the midst of a pandemic. So I am writing to ask that you play your part by putting the right controls in place to protect your workforce, customers and visitors from COVID-19.

To date, there has been a lower rate of COVID-19 infection in Northumberland than in many other areas, particularly our neighbours in Cumbria and further south in West Yorkshire. This is really good news. However, we cannot be complacent and what we do now to prevent the spread of the virus is more important than ever.

We know workplaces can be the source of outbreaks and we cannot afford to throw away the gains we have made locally. I would, at all costs, like to avoid a situation where a Northumberland business is forced to close due to a significant outbreak, so I urge you to follow all relevant government guidance to ensure that your workplace is as safe as it can be and is fully prepared to respond appropriately to any case of COVID-19 within the workforce.

I would especially ask you to be a responsible employer when dealing with employees who might be unwell. It is essential that they are supported to self-isolate and that they contact the NHS Test and Trace service to book a test. I know this may present operational issues for some businesses, but it is very important that everyone complies. Resources to support businesses to log visitor and customer information and to explain to people why they may be asked to provide contact details are available at <https://coronavirusresources.phe.gov.uk/Enjoy-Summer-Safely/resources/customer-logging-businesses/>.

A range of action cards are available [here](#) which explain what to do if you have a suspected or confirmed case in your business. It is vital that you follow this guidance and the contact telephone number for the North East Health Protection Team is 0300 303 8596 Option 1. You are critical to protecting the health of Northumberland communities and visitors.

We're aware that some businesses may be concerned about collecting data and reporting cases because of potential reputational issues should this subsequently be linked to an outbreak. I would like to reassure you that following the guidance increases the likelihood of your business remaining open; reflects positively on you as a responsible employer; increases public confidence and could increase the use of retail and hospitality businesses

who are compliant; and contributes to national efforts to keep the virus at bay and ultimately save lives. Any failure to comply could delay a response by our regional Health Protection Team and negatively impact on your business as well as local and national efforts to prevent outbreaks.

Please also encourage your staff and customers to continue to carry out the simple actions that can prevent the spread of COVID-19. These are:

- Wash their hands as often as possible, for 20 seconds with warm water and soap or use a hand sanitiser
- Keep their distance from others, particularly in indoor spaces (2m if possible or 1m plus other measures such as wearing a face covering)
- Wear a face covering in the places they are required to and when it is difficult to stay socially distanced
- If they show symptoms, self-isolate and book a test immediately at <http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> or telephone 119.

Guidance for Northumberland businesses to ensure they are 'Covid Secure' can be found at the council's website: www.northumberland.gov.uk.

If you need further guidance on this information or trading safely in your workplace, please contact the Public Protection team at public.protection@northumberland.gov.uk and an officer will contact you back.

Finally, an important note on the use and meaning of tests

We have noticed that some businesses are responding to the occurrence of a COVID case in one of their staff by asking their remaining staff to be tested and then allowing them back to work if negative. This should not be done as test results may be negative while contacts are actually incubating the disease. If other staff are considered to be contacts within the guidance, they must self-isolate for 14 days and should only be tested if they become symptomatic. Extended staff testing should only be undertaken at the request of the Health Protection Team and the Team's advice should be sought in the first instance.

Thank you for your contribution to our efforts to Protect Yourself, Protect Others and Protect Northumberland.

Sent on behalf of

Liz Morgan
Director of Public Health
Northumberland County Council

