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## Covid-19: Self-isolation after infection cut to seven days in England

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The covid self-isolation period in England is being cut from 10 to seven days to reduce disruption to people's lives, the health and social care secretary, Sajid Javid, has confirmed.

The new guidance from the UK Health Security Agency came into force from 22 December and applies to everyone, regardless of vaccination status. It allows people in England infected with SARS-CoV-2 to stop self-isolating up to three days earlier than previously if they provide negative lateral flow test results two days running, from tests taken 24 hours apart on day 6 and day 7 of isolation.

The government intends to update England's health protection regulations when parliament returns from its Christmas break. Until then, it will be regarded as a "reasonable excuse" under current laws to end self-isolation early.

The Health Security Agency said the new approach reflected the latest evidence on the length of the transmission period among cases and would still limit spread of the virus while supporting essential public services and supply chains over the winter.

Analysis by the agency suggested that a seven day isolation period, alongside two negative lateral flow test results, had nearly the same protective effect as a 10-day isolation period without lateral flow device testing among people with covid-19.

Commenting on the guidance change, Richard Tedder, a member of the UK Clinical Virology Network, a group of laboratories throughout the UK, said the requirement for two sequential negative test results was a "good compromise." He said, "Overall this is a compromise based on the supposition that a previously infected person who is not shedding viral proteins, in other words has two negative lateral flow device (LFD) tests, is unlikely to transmit coronavirus to contacts. On a balance of probabilities this is probably correct."

The Health Security Agency has advised people who leave self-isolation on or after day 7 to limit close contact with other people in crowded or poorly ventilated spaces, to work from home, and to minimise contact with anyone who has an increased risk of severe illness from SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Javid said he had accepted the advice of clinical experts. "We want to reduce the disruption from covid to people's everyday lives. It's vital people keep playing their part by testing regularly and isolating if they test positive," he said.

Jenny Harries, the agency's chief executive, said covid-19 was "spreading quickly" and at a pace that could pose a risk to running critical public services. "This new guidance will help break chains of transmission and minimise the impact on lives and livelihoods," she said.

Tedder said that the reagents used in lateral flow devices should be kept under scrutiny, because the antigenic changes in the viral proteins that were likely to occur as the virus continued to evolve in the human population "might lead to loss of reactivity with the LFD."

The new guidance came the day after the prime minister confirmed that there would be no new covid-19 restrictions coming into force in England before Christmas Day.