



**Anneliese Dodds MP**  
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Dear Chancellor,

The number of people testing positive for Covid-19 across the UK continues to rise, with weekly deaths in England and Wales now at the highest level since May. As the country grapples with a devastating second wave of this virus, urgent action is required from the UK Government to contain its spread.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies is clear that an “effective” test, trace and isolate (TTI) system “is important to reduce the incidence of infections in the community”. The evidence shows that a functioning TTI system could significantly reduce the reproduction rate. That is why it is so disappointing that the UK Government’s TTI system is failing so badly. Test turnaround times are too slow. The Government has failed to invest in new testing technologies or resolve challenges with lab capacity. And evidence suggests that only 1 in 10 of those who are asked to self-isolate actually do. These failures led SAGE to argue in September that test and trace is having a “marginal impact on transmission”.

Isolation is currently the weakest part of the UK Government’s shambolic TTI programme. Research conducted for the Department of Health found that only 11% of people asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace have done so. A Sage paper from August found that only around 20% of those reporting symptoms in England were fully self-isolating at home. People on incomes of less than £20,000 or holding less than £100 in savings also consider themselves three times less likely to be able to self-isolate compared with those on incomes of £50,000 or above.

In September, the Government introduced a new £500 Test and Trace Support Payment (TTSP) for people on low incomes who are eligible for benefits, need to self-isolate, cannot work from home and have lost income as a result. As you will know, Local Authorities administer the TTSP using funding provided by central Government. They have been allocated an additional 5% top-up funding with which to make discretionary payments to those who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and who meet the requisite tests in terms of lost income and inability to work from home, but who are not receiving the benefits that confer automatic eligibility. Local Authorities are able to introduce additional criteria for discretionary payments but not allowed to replace them.

I want to highlight several flaws in the TTSP scheme that have arisen since its introduction:

- The TTSP is only automatically offered to those claiming Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit or a small number of legacy benefits. The Resolution Foundation estimates that these criteria mean seven out of every eight workers – including many of the lowest paid – do not qualify.



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- People who are told to self-isolate by the NHS Covid-19 app are not currently eligible for the TTSP. Government guidance states that “further work is needed to determine if it will be possible to qualify for this payment, bearing in mind that app users remain anonymous”.
- Neither the NHS Covid-19 app nor the Government website contain any information about how to apply for the TTSP.
- Labour has heard from individuals on low incomes who have been refused the TTSP because their social security benefits are paid to their partner, meaning their name is not on the necessary systems.
- It is not clear whether households who have No Recourse To Public Funds (NRPF) can receive discretionary payments under the scheme. Some Local Authorities appear to have added NRPF conditions to the eligibility criteria.
- Parents and carers who have to isolate their child at home are not eligible for the payment. They therefore have to miss out on up to two weeks’ work to stay at home with their child.
- Government guidance to local authorities suggests that TTSP funding will be topped up should it run out. However, this does not apply to funding made available for discretionary payments, which is a fixed envelope covering the four months from October to January. This means that local authorities with large numbers of low-income households not receiving or eligible for the benefits required to receive the TTSP are likely to run out of funds with which to make discretionary payments. Labour has heard from Local Authorities who expect to run out of funds for discretionary payments in November.

An effective testing and tracing regime needs effective isolation to break community transmission. As we approach the halfway stage in the lockdown imposed in England on 5 November, Labour is calling on the UK Government to take the following urgent steps to improve the isolation element of the test, trace and isolate programme:

- **Reduce the isolation period**  
By boosting testing capacity to cut the isolation period from 14 days to an initial target of 10 days, focused in the first instance on the health and care workforce and areas where mass testing is in place.
- **Expand eligibility**  
By giving every eligible user of the NHS Covid-19 app access to TTSP, and suspend the NRPF rule for the scheme. The Government must also carry out an urgent assessment of the financial barriers to self-isolation, including the level of Statutory Sick Pay.
- **Improve communication**  
With a proper national and local communications strategy to advertise what support is available for people to self-isolate.



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- **Integrate support networks**  
So local authorities can connect with the NHS, local charities and other public services to maintain regular contact with those self-isolating, protect their welfare and monitor their compliance.
- **Increase transparency**  
With regular government data releases on self-isolation compliance and information on how local authorities are distributing TTSP.

In October, Labour called for a two to three week circuit breaker to suppress the spread of the virus and to give your Government time to resolve the issues with TTI. You emphatically rejected that call both in the House of Commons and in the national media. We are now halfway through a longer, more damaging national lockdown in England as a result, yet it remains unclear how much closer you and your colleagues are to delivering the effective TTI system the country so desperately needs.

I urge you to work with the Prime Minister during his own period of self-isolation to fix these problems as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

Anneliese Dodds