

Coronavirus – pilot schemes will begin contact tracing from tomorrow

The Scottish Government has announced that NHS Scotland contact tracing technology is to be tested in NHS Fife, NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Highland from tomorrow.

The pilot, which is expected to last two weeks, will allow the health boards to test out the software which contact tracers will use to collect the information that they need digitally. The government says this builds on existing contact tracing technology in place across the NHS and will allow health boards to trace more contacts more quickly.

This is the first step in moving towards an extended test, trace, isolate and support (TTIS) approach which will be used to keep transmission in communities low as the country moves out of lockdown.

Over 600 additional staff from the NHS are ready to begin this work, as part of the process of recruiting up to 2000 staff.

The software will be rolled out to all health boards by the end of May and then further enhanced during June.

Health Secretary Jeane Freeman said: "Technology will be an important tool to help us move towards the test, trace, isolate and support approach and safely exit lockdown.

“The software we are developing in Scotland is built on a tried and trusted platform and will allow us to carry out contact tracing on a much larger scale than has been necessary until now. It will also focus on supporting public health teams identify outbreaks and reduce transmission in high risk groups and settings by making it easier for staff to collect and record information.

“The test, trace, isolate and support approach is about breaking the chain of transmission of the virus but it remains vital that alongside this people continue to follow physical distancing advice and practice good hand and cough hygiene.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader and North East Fife MSP Willie Rennie said: “I’m glad that a pilot scheme for the test, trace, isolate and support system is now getting underway. Speed is of the essence in getting this system up and running.

“The slow rate of progress in getting this going and recruiting tracers has made a lot of people very nervous about the Scottish Government’s ability to make it happen.

“Our current test and trace capacity is going to have to mushroom very quickly if we’re going to keep people safe as we lift lockdown.

“If we’re going to see all health boards adopting this by the end of May then the government needs to move quickly.”