



I am Councillor John Black. This is my personal journal of a covid-19 self-test after experiencing symptoms. I hope that by sharing my experiences it will help explain the processes involved and give you my thoughts on how to get through it unscathed.

9th July, Thursday.

I had been a bit lethargic at work yesterday but it was my first week back after lock-down so I put it down to the extra steps on my fitbit. However, I was so tired in the evening, I went to bed by 8.30 and slept right through. My alarm went off at 6 but I couldn't get out of bed. I was so exhausted – it felt like summit night on Kilimanjaro level exhausted. I had no cough, but I had a tightness across my chest.

I lay for half an hour and dozed, but I could still hardly keep my eyes open. I was going through the symptoms of covid-19 in my head. Not all were evident but I was worried enough to look on the government web site. The step by step guide said stay put – an NHS nurse will call me. However, the next “send data” button produces an error message so I was unsure if the NHS had my details or not. My mind was a little too fuzzy to get to grips with that, but I decided to wait and see if she called.

I emailed my boss, apologising for not phoning like he demands, but explaining I was leaving my phone free for the nurse to call. He was good, advising me not to go to work until I have the all clear. Luckily, I can work from home. He also asked me not to tell anyone at work why I was off. The cynic in me would later question this but I agreed.

By 9.30 am I had no call from the nurse so I went through the NHS steps again. To my mind I gave the same answers as before, but this time I was told to call 119. A really nice nurse in Derbyshire asked me a few questions and took all my details. She explained the procedure well. I drive but I do not have a car so a drive through test is not possible. She will send me a self-test pack to my home.

With nothing else to do but wait, I logged on remotely and did what I could at work under the circumstances.

At 3pm my immediate boss texts to say that he has gone to the drive through In Newbury, since we sat together in the office Monday and Tuesday.

10th July, Friday.

The test pack arrived at 10.30 am. I am concerned to see that the courier has an identical package in his hand for my neighbour, along the corridor. I read the extensive instructions. I book the free courier service for tomorrow so cannot actually take the test until tomorrow morning. The swab sample needs to be as fresh as possible. I can't help thinking that this system could be better. There seems to be a lot of time required. I am still very tired and breathless. Although I feel hot to the touch, I do not have a thermometer so can't be sure I have a high temperature.

I log in to a Zoom team meeting at work for our health and safety committee and spend 40 minutes talking to my colleagues without telling them that I am at home waiting for a test. I feel awkward and am a bit paranoid about the way my personnel manager is looking at me. Haha.

My boss texts me late morning that his test came back negative. That is a relief.

I continue to work from home but my mind is really elsewhere and I am not very productive. My boss touches base a couple of times during the day to make sure I am OK.



11th July, Saturday

I wake up at six, still tired but better than yesterday and not so breathless but I have had little exertion since Wednesday afternoon, so probably I would expect to be picking up.

I register my test pack on the government web site, as per the instructions, so that they have my details and the bar codes from both the test and the pre-paid delivery label which will go on the box to send the swab back. The instructions say to register the test just before you take it.

Next, I do the swab. I want to wretch as I swab the back of my throat. My tonsils were removed as a ten-year-old, so I swab where they would have been. Strangely I am advised to use the same swab for both nostrils. I wonder if this is just spreading any infection around, but I do it anyway. Swab goes in the vial. Vial goes in the bag. Bar codes on both vial and bag. Bag in the supplied box. Apply the tamper proof closing sticker and the Royal Mail address label. I'm done.

The process is quite fiddly and I wasn't at my best so I hope I did it correctly. The guide was very thorough and had lots of pictures but I can see how someone with more severe symptoms than me might struggle.

I very nearly went to Tesco. Obviously, I shouldn't and I won't but had to remind myself. I have enough to last me for a few days.

The courier arrived just before 9am to collect the boxed-up swab sample. He wouldn't take the box from my hands. I had to put it on the ground and close the door. The initial instructions say expect to wait 2 or 3 days for the results, but I am hoping the early collection will speed things up.

I am still a littler lethargic but it's the weekend, so I will potter around and keep busy. If I don't get the results (by text, apparently) until Monday, then it will be 4 days since I first reported symptoms. That seems like such a long time for track and trace to get started. I am 60 and am carrying a few extra lockdown pounds so am certainly not in the least risk bracket. Now that I am in just-wait mode my mind turns to life insurance, funeral arrangements and my new grandson. Time for a glass of Shiraz, I think.

My boss texts me to ask if I have enough provisions, and offers to shop for me. He is a decent bloke.

12th July Sunday

A sense of optimism coupled with a sense of trepidation all day, waiting for test results which ultimately never come. I feel slightly better this morning after a lot of rest yesterday.

I realise I massively over-ate yesterday; maybe from stress. ?

13th July Monday

I opened my curtains to see one Magpie on the adjacent roof. How does that old song go? Let's hope that's not a bad omen.

I feel much less tired this morning but still have a tight chest. Breathing is a little wheezy and my forehead is still a little hot to the touch. Luckily, I am working from home. I can easily do that, so I text my boss to let him know.



10.10 am. Text received with results. Negative for covid-19. Such a load of my chest. I let my daughter know first. She is very relieved. She was trying not to show it but you can't be strong all the time.

I email my boss and personnel. My boss offers to bring any paperwork I need. This will be a logistical nightmare for him. Every cold from now till next spring could mean days lost at work. He has had a very good attitude towards this but I realise that not everyone benefits from a good work environment. There are a lot of people out there will lose their job because of this pandemic. I appreciate the work of all the volunteers and hubs out there. For example:

[Speen Community Assistance Forum](#)

So, that's the end of my journal. Be safe. Wash your hands, wear your face mask where necessary and get tested if you think you have symptoms. Do the right thing and be safe.

John Black