

Quarantine, Isolation, and Return to Work after COVID-19 Exposure or Illness

When employees must stay away from work because they have been exposed to persons who have COVID-19 or have become ill themselves, we need to manage their eventual return to work. The information below is based on the current guidelines from CDC, CDPH, and CalOSHA. When managing an employee's return to work, please consult with [Jodi Rosenbaum](#), concerning leave status, medical clearances, or other details.

For employees who are **exposed** to someone with confirmed or presumed COVID-19:

Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick or if they are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should not come to work, stay home, separate themselves from others, monitor their health, and follow directions from their local health department.

Who needs to quarantine?

- Anyone who has been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19
- This includes people who previously had COVID-19 and people who have taken a serologic (antibody) test and have antibodies to the virus

What counts as close contact?

- You were within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more.
- You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19
- You had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them)
- You shared eating or drinking utensils
- They sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you
- See <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact> for more detail on close contact.

Steps to take – Stay Home and Monitor Your Health

CDC and CDPH recently updated guidance to reduce the quarantine period in most cases. However, the local public health department may require a longer or shorter quarantine, depending on the specific conditions of your exposure. Follow the guidance of your health department. If the health department has not provided recommendations for your specific exposure, use the following guidance:

- **Stay home for 10 days** after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19.
- Watch for fever (100.4°F), cough, shortness of breath, or other [symptoms of COVID-19](#).
- Stay away from others in your household as much as possible, especially people who are at higher risk for getting very sick from COVID-19.
- Even if you test negative for COVID-19, you still need to quarantine for at least 10 days. This is due to the incubation period for the virus, which means you could test negative, but still develop symptoms and become infectious days later.

For employees who **test positive** or are presumed to have COVID-19 illness:

If you have or think you might have COVID-19, it is important to stay home and away from other people. Staying away from others helps stop the spread of COVID-19. Some people with COVID-19 may have no symptoms, some may have mild or moderate symptoms for a few days, and some may have severe symptoms. When you can return to work can depend on how severe the illness was.

General guidance from CDC:

If you think or know you had COVID-19 based on testing or diagnosis, and had symptoms, you can return to work after:

- **10 days** since symptoms first appeared and
- **24 hours with no fever** without the use of fever-reducing medications and
- Other COVID-19 **symptoms have improved** (for example, cough, shortness of breath, etc.)*

**Note: Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation*

If you test positive for COVID-19 but had no symptoms, and continue to have no symptoms, you can return to work after:

- **10 days** have passed since you had a positive viral test for COVID-19.

Whether the employee experiences symptoms or not, a negative test is not required to return to work. Most people do not require testing to decide when they can be around others; however, if your healthcare provider recommends testing, they will let you know when you can resume being around others based on your test results.

If a local or state health official issues an order to isolate an employee, the employee may not return to work until the period of isolation or quarantine is completed or the order is lifted. If no time period was specified, then the employee must isolate for at least 10 days from the effective date.

CDC Guidance for people with severe COVID-19 illness:

- People who are severely ill (or hospitalized) with COVID-19 might need to stay home longer than 10 days and up to 20 days after symptoms first appeared. In these cases, follow the advice of your healthcare provider.
- Persons who are severely immunocompromised may require testing to determine when they can be around others. Talk to your healthcare provider for more information.
- UC ANR may request a medical clearance from your doctor before returning to work, in order to verify that you are recovered enough to return and to determine if you have any work limitations that need accommodation.

For more information

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/COVID-19-Quarantine.aspx>

<https://covid19.ca.gov/testing-and-treatment>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/returning-to-work.html>

<https://www.dir.ca.gov/OSHSB/documents/COVID-19-Prevention-Emergency-apprvd.txt.pdf>