What to do if you test positive for COVID-19

Summary of May 20, 2022 Changes

- Inclusion of information on COVID-19 therapeutics

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- Technical changes to link to CDC guidance on travel, DOH isolation and quarantine calculator tool and information on Care Connect Washington.

Introduction

If you test positive for COVID-19, you can help stop the spread of COVID-19 to others. Please follow the guidance below.

- Students, children and staff in K-12 schools and child care should follow the K-12 and Child Care requirements.
- People who are staying or working in a health care facility should follow the guidance from CDC's Interim Guidance for Managing Healthcare Personnel with SARS-CoV-2 Infection or Exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and CDC's Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic.

Isolate at home

People who test positive for COVID-19 or those who have symptoms for COVID-19 and are waiting test results should isolate at home. **You should isolate regardless of your vaccination status.** Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, ridesharing, or taxis. Ask others to do your shopping or use a grocery delivery service. If you need food or other support while you isolate at home, Care Connect Washington is available. Call the COVID-19 Information hotline at 1-800-5250127, then press #. Language assistance is available.

Separate as much as possible from others at home by staying in a specific room away from other people and using a separate bathroom if available. Wear a well-fitting mask when you need to be around others.

You should stay home except to get medical care. Call before you go to the doctor. Tell your health care provider you have COVID-19 or are being evaluated for COVID-19.

How long do I need to isolate myself?

How long you should isolate depends on whether you can wear a well-fitting mask, whether you are severely ill with COVID-19 or have a weakened immune system, and whether you are staying or working in a congregate setting. Please see the section below that applies to you.

If you **can** wear a well-fitting mask around others at home and in public:

If you tested positive for COVID-19 and had symptoms, isolate for at least **5 days** after your symptoms first appeared. See below to calculate your 5-day isolation period. You can leave isolation after 5 full days if:

- Your symptoms are improving 5 days after the start of your isolation, **AND**
- You have not had a fever for 24 hours without use of fever reducing-medication, AND
- You continue to consistently wear a well-fitting mask around others at home and in public for 5 additional days.

If you continue to have a fever or your other symptoms have not improved after 5 days of isolation, wait to end your isolation until you are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and your other symptoms have improved.

If you tested positive for COVID-19 but have not had any symptoms, isolate for at least **5 days** after you tested positive for COVID-19. See below to calculate your 5-day isolation period. You can leave isolation after 5 full days if:

- You have not developed symptoms, AND
- You continue to consistently wear a well-fitting mask around others at home and in public for 5 additional days.

If you develop symptoms after testing positive, your 5-day isolation should start over. Follow the recommendations above for ending isolation if you had symptoms.

Consistent mask use means wearing a well-fitting mask whenever around others inside or outside the home and not engaging in activities around others during which you cannot wear a mask, such as sleeping, eating, or swimming. No mask alternatives (e.g., face shield with drape) may be used as substitutes during the 5 days of additional masking.

If you have access to an antigen test, you can further decrease your risk of infecting others by taking a test on day 5 of isolation. Collect the test sample only if you are fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication and your other symptoms have improved (loss of taste or smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation). If your test is negative, you can end isolation after day 5, but continue wearing a mask when around other people for 5 more days. If your test is positive, you should continue to isolate until 10 days have gone by since your symptoms first appeared (or until 10 days have gone by since you initially tested positive for COVID-19 if you never developed symptoms).

Here is additional guidance for the 10 days after you developed symptoms (or tested positive, if you never developed symptoms):
- For the full 10 days, avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, and do not go to healthcare facilities (including nursing homes) and other high-risk settings.

- For the full 10 days, do not go to places where you are unable to wear a mask, such as restaurants and some gyms, and avoid eating around others at home and at work.
- See Travel | CDC for information on travel.

If you **cannot** wear a well-fitting mask around others at home and in public:

If you tested positive for COVID-19 and had symptoms, you can stop your home isolation after **10 days** have gone by since your symptoms first appeared if:

- You have not had a fever for 24 hours without use of fever reducing-medication, **AND**
- Your symptoms have improved.

If you continue to have a fever or your other symptoms have not improved after 10 days of isolation, wait to end your isolation until you are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and your other symptoms have improved.

If you tested positive for COVID-19, but have not had any symptoms, you can stop your home isolation after **10 days** have gone by since you tested positive for COVID-19 if:

- You have not developed symptoms

If you do develop symptoms after testing positive, your 10-day isolation should start over. Follow the recommendations above for ending isolation if you had symptoms.

If you are severely ill with COVID-19 or have a weakened immune system:

People who are severely ill with COVID-19 (including those who were hospitalized or required intensive care or ventilation support) and people with compromised immune systems may need to isolate at home longer. They may also require testing with a viral test to determine when they can be around others. CDC recommends an isolation period of at least 10 and up to 20 days for people who were severely ill with COVID-19 and for people with weakened immune systems. Consult with your healthcare provider about when you can resume being around other people. See the therapeutics section below for information about treatments and medications that you may qualify for.

If you are staying or working in any of these congregate settings:

People who live or work in the following congregate setting should follow the isolation recommendations as outlined below.

- Correctional or detention facility
- Homeless shelter or transitional housing
- Commercial maritime setting (e.g., commercial seafood vessels, cargo ships, cruise ships)
- Crowded work setting where physical distancing is not possible due to the nature of the work, such as in warehouses, factories, and food packaging and meat processing facilities
- Temporary worker housing

If you tested positive for COVID-19 and had symptoms, you can end isolation from the congregate setting after **10 days** have gone by since your symptoms first appeared if:

- You have not had a fever for 24 hours without use of fever reducing-medication, **AND**
- Your symptoms have improved.

If you work but do not live in the congregate setting, do not go to workplace for a full 10 days, but you may follow the shortened home isolation guidance above based on whether you can or cannot wear a well-fitting mask.

If you tested positive for COVID-19, but have not had any symptoms, you can end isolation from the congregate setting after **10 days** have gone by since you tested positive for COVID-19 if:
- You have not developed symptoms

If you do develop symptoms after testing positive, your 10-day isolation from this setting should start over. Follow the recommendations above for ending isolation if you had symptoms. If you work but do not live in the congregate setting, do not go to the workplace for a full 10 days, but you may follow the shortened home isolation guidance above based on whether you can or cannot wear a well-fitting mask.

During periods of critical staffing shortages, correctional facilities, detention facilities, homeless shelters, transitional housing, and critical infrastructure workplaces may consider shortening the isolation period for staff to ensure continuity of operations. Decisions to shorten isolation in these settings should be made in consultation with the local health jurisdiction.

COVID-19 Therapeutics

Early intervention with COVID-19 therapeutics (treatments and medications) can reduce the risk of severe illness and hospitalization for people with COVID-19 who are at high risk of developing more serious illness. If you think you may qualify, please speak to your health care provider to determine your eligibility for COVID-19 therapeutics (PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), monoclonal antibodies or oral antivirals).

Visit the DOH webpage for more information for you and your health care provider on specific COVID-19 therapeutics.

When am I potentially contagious and may expose others?

People with COVID-19 can spread the virus to other people starting two days before they develop symptoms (or 2 days before the date of their positive test if they do not have symptoms) through 10 days after they develop symptoms (or 10 days after the date of their positive test if they do not have symptoms). If a person with COVID-19's isolation period is longer than 10 days (e.g., because they are severely ill or immunocompromised), they are contagious through the end of their isolation period.

If a person with COVID-19 is isolating for 5 days followed by 5 days of consistent mask use out of isolation because their symptoms were improving or gone on day 5, people exposed to the case days 6-10 are not close contacts so long as the case is wearing a well-fitting mask. If the case is not wearing a well-fitting mask, people exposed to the case on days 6-10 are considered close contacts.

How do I calculate my 5-day or 10-day isolation period?

If you have symptoms, day 0 is your first day of symptoms. Day 1 is the first full day after your symptoms developed.

If you have not had any symptoms, day 0 is your positive viral test date (the date you were tested). Day 1 is the first full day after the specimen was collected for your positive test.

See the DOH Isolation and Quarantine Calculator tool for assistance.

What to do during isolation

- **Monitor for symptoms.** Get medical help right away if your symptoms get worse. If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, tell the dispatch staff that you have COVID-19 symptoms. If possible, put on a face covering before emergency services arrive.
- **Separate from others**, including household members and pets, as much as possible. Stay in a separate room and use a separate bathroom, if possible. If you must care for a family member or an animal, wear a face covering and wash your hands before and after you interact with them. There is more information about COVID-19 and Animals at the site linked.
- **Wear a well-fitting mask** when you are around others and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a well-fitting mask, people in your household should not be in the same room with you; they should wear a well-fitting mask or respirator if they must enter your room.
- **Take steps to improve ventilation at home**, if possible.
- **Don't share personal items with anyone**, including dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding with people or pets in your home.

Participate in a public health interview

An interviewer from public health may contact you if you test positive for COVID-19, usually by phone. The interviewer will help you understand what to do next and what support is available. The interviewer will ask for the names and contact information of people you have had close contact with recently to notify them about exposure. They ask for this information so they can notify people who may have been exposed. The interviewer will not share your name with your close contacts.

If you tested positive using a self-test

Please see Interim SARS-CoV-2 Self-Testing Guidance for more information.

What's the difference between isolation and quarantine?

- **Isolation** is what you do if you have COVID-19 symptoms, are awaiting test results, or have tested positive for COVID-19. Isolation means you stay home and away from others (including household members) for the recommended period of time to avoid spreading illness.
- **Quarantine** is what you do if you have been exposed to COVID-19. Quarantine means you stay home and away from others for the recommended period of time in case you

are infected and are contagious. Quarantine becomes isolation if you later test positive for COVID-19 or develop COVID-19 symptoms.

Mental and Behavioral Health Resources

Please visit the DOH Behavioral Health Resources and Recommendations webpage for additional information.

More COVID-19 information and resources

If somebody does not have a doctor or health care provider: many locations have free or low-cost testing, regardless of immigration status. See the Department of Health's Testing FAQ or call the WA State COVID-19 Information Hotline.

Stay up-to-date on the current COVID-19 situation in Washington, Governor Inslee's proclamations, symptoms, how it spreads, and how and when people should get tested. See our Frequently Asked Questions for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. Stigma will not help to fight the illness. Share only accurate information to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID-19)
- WA State Coronavirus Response (COVID-19)
- Find Your Local Health Department or District
- CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Stigma Reduction Resources

Have more questions? Call our COVID-19 Information hotline: **1-800-525-0127**

Monday – 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday and observed state holidays, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language.** For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email civil.rights@doh.wa.gov.