



CDC Update

COVID-19 Quarantine Guidance

Just before the Holidays the CDC has provided some much-needed relief to employers and employees regarding COVID exposure and quarantine. On December 2nd, the CDC posted a [new document and webpage](#), announcing new quarantine and self-isolation guidance.

One of the most notable changes by the CDC is with respect to individuals who have previously tested positive for COVID. Specifically, individuals who have tested positive within three-months of “close-contact” with COVID positive person need not quarantine or get tested again. However, people who had close-contact and develop symptoms again within 3 months of their first bout of COVID-19 may need to be tested again if there is no other cause identified for their symptoms.

Additionally, the CDC has provided clarification regarding what constitutes “close contact”:

- Within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more
- Provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19
- Had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them)
- Shared eating or drinking utensils
- Sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you

The CDC has also clarified the difference between “isolation” and “quarantine”:

- **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 stay home, separate themselves from others, monitor their health, and follow directions from their state or local health department.
- **Isolation** keeps someone who is infected with the virus away from others, even in their home.

The next big change is the new guidance for post-exposure quarantine. The CDC, recognizing the financial hardship and strain on the healthcare system associated with a 14-day quarantine, has modified its guidance. The CDC now provides two additional options for the length of quarantine. Specifically, quarantine may end:

- On day 10 without testing (employee may return to work on day 11)
- On day 7 after receiving a negative test result (employees may return to work on day 8 after receiving just one negative test – note that this is a departure from the previous test-based strategy which required two negative tests at least 24-hours apart before returning to work)

The CDC advises that even after quarantine, individuals should self-monitor for symptoms. Any person who experiences COVID symptoms should immediately self-isolate and contact their healthcare provider. Additionally, the CDC advised that individuals wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, wash their hands frequently, avoid crowds, and take other steps to [prevent the spread of COVID-19](#).

While the CDC has offered these seemingly less restrictive guidelines, it continues to endorse quarantine for 14 days and recognizes that any quarantine shorter than 14 days balances reduced burden against the possibility of spreading the virus.

Finally, employers must review the guidelines and requirements set forth by local and state authorities. Local public health authorities make the final decisions about how long quarantine should last in the communities they serve, based on local conditions and needs.

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