This guidance document is being reviewed for updates. The Washington State Department of Health has updated its guidance for what to do if you are sick with COVID-19 or were exposed to COVID-19. This document may have content that is inconsistent with the new guidance.

What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19

Summary of February 8, 2023 Changes

- Updated guidance about use of repeat testing if you test negative using an antigen test

Introduction

If you have been exposed to COVID-19, or think you have been exposed, you can help prevent the spread of the virus to others in your home and community. Please follow the guidance below. Please note the additional guidance for specific settings here:

- People who are staying, working, or visiting in a health care facility should follow the guidance in Interim Recommendations for SARS-CoV- 2 Infection Prevention and Control in Healthcare Settings.
- If you work or are staying in a crowded work site, temporary worker housing, commercial maritime setting, corrections or detention facility, homeless shelter, or transitional housing, please follow the guidance under Information for people staying or working in certain congregate settings.

Local health jurisdictions may use their discretion, based on considerations such as outbreak control and preventive measures in place, to relax or expand upon these recommendations. As defined in RCW 70.05.070, local health officers may take measures as they deem necessary to control and prevent the spread of infectious disease.

I had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 but I am not sick. What should I do?

Get tested for COVID-19 3-5 days after your last exposure.

- If you test positive, follow the guidance in What to do if you test positive for COVID-19.
- If you test negative by an antigen test, consider retesting with an antigen test 24-48 hours after the first negative test. If the second test is negative, but concerns exist for COVID-19, consider retesting 24-48 hours after the second negative test, for a total of at

least 3 tests. If you get a negative result on the third test and are concerned you could have COVID-19, you may choose to test again using an antigen test, consider getting a laboratory molecular-based test, or call your health care provider. If you do not have adequate resources to test 3 times with an antigen test, it is acceptable to test less in accordance with your resources and the level of risk to you and those around you.

- If you have been exposed to COVID-19 and have no symptoms but had COVID-19 in the past 30 days, testing is not recommended. If you had COVID-19 within the past 30-90 days, use an antigen test (not a PCR test), as PCR results may remain persistently positive even if there is not a new, active infection.

For the 10 days after your last exposure to the person with COVID-19, take the following steps:

- Wear a high-quality mask or respirator around others at home and in public. Continue to wear a mask even if you test negative for COVID-19.
    - Do not go places where you are unable to wear a mask.
    - If someone is unable to wear a mask due to being less than 2 years of age or having a disability that prevents them from wearing a mask, other preventive actions (such as improving ventilation) should be used to avoid transmission during these 10 days.
- Avoid being around people at high risk of severe disease, and do not go to high risk settings (e.g., healthcare facilities).
- Watch for symptoms of COVID-19.
- If symptoms develop, get tested and follow the steps under I had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and now I'm sick. What should I do?
- See Travel | CDC for information on travel.
- See Interim SARS-CoV-2 Self-Testing Guidance (wa.gov) for guidance if you are using a self-test.

Household exposures often result in prolonged and repeated contact with individuals positive for COVID-19. If you are continuously exposed to COVID-19 at home, watch for symptoms of COVID-19 and wear a high-quality mask or respirator around others at home and in public from the start of your exposure through 10 days after your last exposure to the person with COVID-19 during their contagious period. Test every 3-5 days after your first exposure through 3-5 days after your last exposure to the person with COVID-19.

Information for people staying or working in certain congregate settings:

Quarantine is no longer a standard recommendation in non-healthcare congregate settings. However, quarantine may be considered in the following non-healthcare congregate settings under certain circumstances:

- Correctional facilities and detention facilities
- Homeless shelters and transitional housing
- Crowded work sites where physical distancing is not possible due to the nature of the work (e.g., warehouses, factories, food packaging and meat processing facilities, and employer-provided transportation)
- Temporary worker housing

- [Commercial maritime settings](#) (e.g., commercial seafood vessels, cargo ships, cruise ships)

Circumstances in which quarantine may be considered include:

- Outbreak control, especially if other mitigation measures have not been successful at halting transmission
- If other prevention measures are not in place for people exposed to COVID-19, such as testing and masking

In such circumstances, the duration of quarantine should be 5-10 days since last exposure based on COVID-19's incubation period, depending on level of risk tolerance. To calculate a quarantine period, the date of your exposure to the person with COVID-19 during their contagious period is day 0. Day 1 is the first full day after your last close contact with the person with COVID-19.

Alternatives to quarantine may also be considered, such as having an employee work remotely or temporary reassignment to an area of the facility with an individual workspace and good ventilation.

People in these settings should also follow the guidance above under "[I had close contact with someone who tested positive COVID-19 but I am not sick. What should I do?](#)".

Facilities may consult with their local health jurisdiction about whether quarantine or a quarantine alternative would be appropriate in a situation, and facilities should follow any local health jurisdiction guidance. It is possible local health jurisdictions will require quarantine in circumstances where quarantine may be considered.

How was I exposed to COVID-19?

The virus that causes COVID-19 is transmitted by aerosolized particles of different sizes, including those that can be contracted by close contact, e.g., within 6 feet, as well as those that may stay suspended in the air and be transmitted farther, especially in poorly ventilated indoor settings. People with COVID-19 can spread the virus to other people starting two days before they develop symptoms (or two 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 who tested positive for COVID-19 receives two sequential negative COVID-19 tests 24-48 hours apart when feeling better after at least 5 days of isolation, they are no longer considered to be contagious.

Being a close contact generally means you have been within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 for at least 15 cumulative minutes or more over a 24-hour period of time. If, however, you have been in situations that increase the risk of potential exposure, such as confined spaces, spaces with poor ventilation or areas where people are performing activities such as shouting or singing, there is still a risk that you may be exposed even if someone with COVID-19 is more than 6 feet away from you. Some people get COVID-19 without knowing how they were exposed.

Participate in a public health interview

If someone with COVID-19 tells public health they have recently been in close contact with you, you may hear from public health by text or phone call. An interviewer will help you understand what to do and what support is available. The interviewer will not tell you who gave them your name.

I had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and now I'm sick. What should I do?

If you were exposed to COVID-19 and develop symptoms (even mild ones), you should stay home and away from others and get tested for COVID-19 with a viral test, regardless of vaccination status.

- If you test negative by an antigen test:
    - Stay home until you have had no fever within the past 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication **AND** your symptoms have significantly improved.
    - Consider retesting every 24-48 hours through at least five days after your symptoms started. If you get a negative result on a test at least five days after your symptoms started and are concerned you could have COVID-19, you may choose to test again using an antigen test, consider getting a laboratory molecular-based test, or call your health care provider.
- If you test negative and your symptoms resolve, resume the guidance under I had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, but I am not sick. What should I do?
- If you test positive, follow the guidance in What to do if you test positive for COVID-19 (wa.gov). If you are not tested, follow the same isolation and mask guidance as people who test positive.
- See Interim SARS-CoV-2 Self-Testing Guidance (wa.gov) for guidance if you are using a self-test.

Wear a high-quality mask if you must be around other people inside or outside your household. Other people outside of your household should wear a mask or respirator if you must be around them. If your symptoms get worse or you develop new symptoms, consult with a healthcare provider.

If somebody does not have a 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.

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** means staying home and away from others after being exposed to COVID-19 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

Stay up-to-date on the current COVID-19 situation in Washington, symptoms, how it spreads, how and when people should get tested, and where to find vaccines. 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 accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- WA State Department of Health COVID-19 Response
- Find Your Local Health Department or District
- CDC Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Have more questions? Call our COVID-19 Information hotline at **1-800-525-0127.** Hotline hours:
- Monday from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- Tuesday through Sunday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- observed state holidays from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language.** For questions about your own health 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.