



COVID-19 ISOLATION AND POST-EXPOSURE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY SETTINGS

Updated: **September 29, 2022**

This document applies to most community settings, including workplaces and schools, and the public (refer to section on Exceptions and Special Circumstances for additional considerations). Guidance for healthcare facilities is available on the NJDOH COVID-19 website for healthcare professionals: https://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/topics/covid2019_healthcare.shtml.

BACKGROUND

The risk of medically significant illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 has been drastically reduced as a result of high levels of vaccine- and infection-induced immunity, and the availability of effective treatments and tools for prevention. It is still necessary, however, to protect persons most at risk for severe illness due to older age, disability, immunocompromised status, or other underlying medical conditions through the use of COVID-19 vaccines, the use of well-fitting masks¹ or respirators, preexposure prophylaxis if indicated, and antivirals. Moreover, persons who live in a household or who have contact with others at increased risk of severe illness are recommended to self-test in an effort to detect infection before contact, be [up to date](#) on their COVID-19 vaccines, and use a well-fitting mask or respirator.

Although it is recommended that individuals take [extra precautions](#) around others who [are at risk for severe illness](#) from COVID-19, to limit barriers to social, educational, and economic activity and given the high population level of COVID-19 antibody seroprevalence, quarantining² of exposed individuals is no longer recommended by the CDC, although masking and testing are recommended. These changes are reflected in updated CDC guidance on [isolation](#) and [What to Do If You Were Exposed to COVID-19](#).

ISOLATION (APPLIES TO *INFECTED PERSONS*)

Isolation is used to separate people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 from those without COVID-19. The majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in the 1–2 days prior to and 2-3 days after onset of symptoms.

Persons who have COVID-19 [symptoms](#) should be tested for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#). Everyone who tests positive for COVID-19 infection or who has symptoms of COVID-19 (including those waiting for test results or who haven't been tested), regardless of vaccination status, should isolate for at least 5 full

¹Some masks and respirators offer higher levels of protection than others, and some may be harder to tolerate or wear consistently. It is most important to wear a well-fitted mask or respirator correctly that is comfortable and that provides good protection <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/types-of-masks.html>.

² Quarantine means to separate and restrict the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.

days and take additional precautions during and after isolation. Persons at high risk of severe illness should consult with a healthcare provider right away to determine if treatment is warranted.

During Isolation (Day 05 or longer if symptoms persist)³

- **ISOLATE AT HOME**: Stay home, separate from other people and pets, and use a separate bathroom, if possible. [Improve ventilation](#) (airflow) at home and don't share personal items such as cups, utensils, and towels. Wash hands frequently and regularly clean and disinfect surfaces in the home. If you must leave the house (e.g., to seek medical care), do not go to places where you are unable to mask.
- **NOTIFY CLOSE CONTACTS**: Tell your close contacts they may have been exposed so they can take steps to care for themselves and their families.
- **MASK**: Wear a well-fitted mask or respirator if you must be around others.
- **MONITOR FOR WARNING SIGNS**: Seek emergency medical care immediately if you experience any emergency warning signs such as difficulty breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new onset confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone. After ending isolation, if COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen, restart isolation at day 0.
- **IF ASYMPTOMATIC, MONITOR FOR SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19**: If symptoms develop and you are at high risk of severe illness, consult with a healthcare provider right away. If symptoms develop within 10 days of when you were tested, restart the isolation clock with 0 being the day of symptom onset.
- **POSTPONE TRAVEL**: Avoid travel until a full 5 days after your first day of symptoms or if asymptomatic, after the date of the positive test. Avoid public transportation, ride-sharing or taxis if possible.

Ending Isolation

Most people can end isolation after 5 full days (i.e., on Day 6) if asymptomatic or if fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and if other symptoms are improving.⁴ If symptoms persist (fever or if other symptoms have not improved), continue to isolate until fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medication for 24 hours and other symptoms have improved.

Persons with moderate or severe illness or who have a weakened immune system should isolate through at least day 10. Persons with severe illness or a weakened immune system should consult with a doctor before ending isolation.³

³ These timeframes do not apply to people with severe COVID-19 or with weakened immune systems (immunocompromised). See Exceptions and Special Circumstances section.

⁴ Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation.

After Ending Isolation (i.e., Day 6-10)

- **MASK:** Wear a [high-quality](#) mask or respirator when around others at home and in public through day 10. For those ending isolation on day 5, this would be during days 6 through 10. Do not go places where you are unable to wear a mask until it is recommended that you discontinue masking (i.e., on day 11). Avoid eating around others for a full 10 days.
 - a. After the 5-day isolation period (or longer if symptoms persist), individuals who test negative on two sequential antigen tests taken at least 48 hours apart may discontinue wearing a mask sooner than day 11. The first of the two antigen tests should be taken no sooner than day 6. If an antigen test result is positive, one may still be infectious and should continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours before testing again. Continue taking antigen tests at least 48 hours apart until there are two sequential negative results (there may be a need to continue wearing a mask and testing beyond day 10).
- **AVOID OTHERS AT HIGH-RISK FOR SEVERE ILLNESS:** Regardless of when you end isolation, avoid being around people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, including those at nursing homes and other high-risk settings until at least day 11.
- **POSTPONE TRAVEL:** Postpone travel for a full 10 days if possible. If travel is *necessary* on days 6-10, wear a high-quality mask when around others for the entire duration of travel. Persons unable to wear a mask should not travel during the 10 days.

WHAT TO DO WHEN EXPOSED TO COVID-19

Regardless of your vaccination status or if you had a previous infection, if you have been in close contact⁵ with someone with COVID-19, you would be considered exposed. Persons having close contact with someone who is in their isolation period would be considered exposed. Persons having close contact with someone who has completed their isolation period but who is still taking additional precautions through day 10 are not considered exposed but should self-monitor for symptoms for 10 days and, if concerned about possible exposure, get tested for COVID-19.

After an exposure to someone with COVID-19

- **MASK:** Immediately wear a well-fitting mask or respirator when around others at home or in indoor public settings as soon as you find out you were exposed to someone with COVID-19. The date of the last exposure is considered day 0 and a mask should be worn for 10 full days. Do not go to places where you are unable to mask and avoid eating around others until a full 10 days has elapsed since last contact.
- **MONITOR FOR SYMPTOMS:** Watch for a fever (100.4 °F or greater), cough, shortness of breath, or other [COVID-19 symptoms](#). If symptoms develop, isolate immediately, get tested, and stay

⁵ Someone who was less than 6 feet away from an infected person (laboratory-confirmed or a clinical diagnosis) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.

home until test results are known. If you are at high risk of severe illness, consult with a healthcare provider right away.

- **TAKE PRECAUTIONS AROUND PERSONS AT HIGH-RISK FOR SEVERE ILLNESS:** Take [extra precautions](#) when around persons who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe illness, including those you live with or who are at nursing homes and other high-risk settings until at least day 11.
- **TRAVEL:** Persons unable to wear a mask should not travel during the 10 days after exposure to COVID-19.
- **TEST:** Get tested on day 6, even if symptoms don't develop. If you test positive, isolate immediately. If you test negative, continue to take precautions, including wearing a mask when around others at home and in public through day 10.

TESTING CONSIDERATIONS

COVID-19 tests are not authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to evaluate duration of infectiousness. Some people may remain positive by Nucleic Acid Amplification Tests (NAATs) (e.g., RT-PCR) for up to 90 days, long beyond the period of expected infectiousness. People may also continue to test positive on antigen tests for a few weeks after an initial positive. While a positive antigen test likely means a person can potentially infect others, a negative antigen test does not necessarily indicate the absence of transmissible virus. With this in mind, over-the-counter antigen test results should not be used as the sole basis for treatment or case management decisions.

If you use a home-based antigen test and your result is negative, multiple tests may be necessary (follow manufacturer's instructions). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises people to perform repeat, or serial, testing following a negative result on any at-home COVID-19 antigen test, to reduce the risk an infection may be missed (false negative result) and to help prevent people from unknowingly spreading the SARS-CoV-2 virus to others. The FDA recommends repeat testing following a negative result whether or not you have COVID-19 symptoms. Refer to [At-Home COVID-19 Antigen Tests-Take Steps to Reduce Your Risk of False Negative: FDA Safety Communication](#) for information on repeat testing.

EXCEPTIONS AND SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Household settings

Isolation and quarantine can be challenging in households, particularly when caregiving is involved. Persons with COVID-19 should stay home and isolate away from other people for at least 5 full days and wear a well-fitted mask around others in the home (and in public) for 5 additional days, or until getting two sequential negative antigen test results 48 hours apart with the first of the two antigen tests taken no sooner than day 6.

Those who are unable to consistently wear a mask at home should isolate from household members for a full 10 days or until getting two sequential negative antigen test results 48 hours apart if they wish to discontinue mask wearing before day 11.

Day 0 for household contacts who can't isolate away from the household member with COVID-19 would start on the day after the household member completes their isolation period, UNLESS the household member is able to consistently wear a well-fitted mask in the household through the duration of isolation, in which case, day 0 would start on the day after the household member completes their 5-day isolation period.

Persons with special circumstances

- Children < 2 years of age, or other individuals who are unable to wear a mask should isolate (if infected) and avoid being around others if exposed for 10 days.
- People who have [moderate](#)⁶ COVID-19 illness (those who experienced shortness of breath or had difficulty breathing), severe illness (including those who are hospitalized) due to COVID-19, or who have a weakened immune system should isolate for 10 days. People with severe illness or a weakened immune system should consult with their healthcare provider to determine the appropriate duration of isolation.

REFERENCES

CDC:

[Isolation and Precautions for People with COVID-19](#)

[Isolation Recommendations Flowchart](#)

[What to Do If You Were Exposed to COVID-19](#)

[COVID-19 Testing: What You Need to Know](#)

[Clinical Spectrum of SARS-CoV-2 Infection](#)

[Stay Up to Date with Your Vaccines](#)

[Types of Masks and Respirators](#)

[Guidance on Prevention and Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19 in Correctional and Detention Facilities\)](#)

FDA:

[At-Home COVID-19 Antigen Tests-Take Steps to Reduce Your Risk of False Negative: FDA Safety Communication](#)

⁶ Individuals who show evidence of lower respiratory disease during clinical assessment or imaging and who have an oxygen saturation (SpO₂) ≥94% on room air at sea level.