

COVID-19 PATIENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR SELF-ISOLATION WHILE AWAITING LABORATORY RESULTS

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 is a virus that causes a respiratory illness. Health experts are still learning about the illness caused by this new virus. People infected have had an illness that has ranged from mild (like a common cold) to severe requiring individuals to be hospitalized. Deaths from COVID-19 have also occurred mainly among older individuals and those with underlying medical conditions.

The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) by respiratory droplets produced when a person talks, coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands.
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

If you develop symptoms, your healthcare providers may order a test. Your results will be provided back to you by your healthcare provider anywhere between a few minutes to seven days after testing. The time it takes depends on the type of test, the testing volume and the laboratory doing the testing.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHILE I WAIT FOR MY RESULT?

- Self-isolate in your home.
- If you live with others, self-isolate in a private room and use a private bathroom if possible.
- Make a list of close contacts you have had from two days before you became sick (or tested positive if you did not have symptoms) until you began isolation. Close contacts are people who have been within 6 feet of you for 15 minutes or more. A close contact could also be someone you had extremely close contact with (face to face) even if less than 15 minutes or if you spent time with an individual while you felt sick.
- Interact with others as little as possible.
- Wear a tight-fitting mask if you must be around others.
- If you develop additional symptoms or if your symptoms get worse, contact your healthcare provider for instructions.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I TEST POSITIVE?

- Notify your close contacts and let them know they will need to quarantine at home. This includes your family members.
 - Quarantine should ideally be for 14 days from the last time they had contact with you; however, for individuals who do not develop symptoms, quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing or after Day 7 if a specimen collected after Day 5 tests negative on a diagnostic test (i.e., PCR, antigen). Close contacts should monitor their health for any symptoms for the full 14 days after exposure.
 - The quarantine for family members who cannot separate from you (the infected case) begins after your infectious period ends. If the contact does not develop symptoms, quarantine can be as short as 17 days (with a negative test as described above) or 20-24 days if no testing is performed.
 - If your close contacts are fully vaccinated, they do not have to quarantine but should monitor themselves for symptoms. An individual is considered fully vaccinated when 2 or more weeks have passed after the

receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose vaccine series, or 2 or more weeks have passed after receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine. Individuals who develop symptoms compatible with COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should be evaluated by a healthcare provider and tested as appropriate. Close contacts who work in a healthcare setting should consult with their employers about possible work exclusion.

- Keep a phone nearby so that you can answer the call and participate fully in your confidential case investigation for contact tracing.
- If you have symptoms, self-isolate in your home until both of the following conditions are met:
 1. It has been at least ten days since your symptoms first appeared AND
 2. It has been at least one day since you have not had a fever (without using fever-reducing medications) and your respiratory symptoms are improving (e.g., cough, shortness of breath).
- If you test positive and do not develop symptoms, self-isolate in your home until it has been at least ten days since the day your test specimen was collected.
- After consultation with infection control experts, some people with severe illness or who are severely immunocompromised may need to isolate for 20 days or more after symptom onset.
- If your symptoms get worse or if you require hospitalization, notify your healthcare provider immediately.
- If you do not need hospitalization, continue to self-isolate at home.

WHAT DO I DO IF MY TEST IS NEGATIVE?

- If you had a **known exposure** to a confirmed case, continue to quarantine. Quarantine should ideally be for 14 days from the last time they had contact with you; however, for individuals who do not develop symptoms, quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing or after Day 7 if a specimen collected on or after Day 5 tests negative on a diagnostic test (i.e., PCR, antigen). Close contacts should monitor their health for any symptoms for the full 14 days after exposure. If you are fully vaccinated, you do not have to quarantine after a known exposure but should still monitor yourself for symptoms. An individual is considered fully vaccinated when 2 or more weeks have passed after the receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose vaccine series, or 2 or more weeks have passed after receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine. Individuals who develop symptoms compatible with COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should be evaluated by a healthcare provider and tested as appropriate. Close contacts who work in a healthcare setting should consult with their employers about possible work exclusion.
- If you were tested but had **no known exposure** to a confirmed case, and you do not have any symptoms, you can stop your self-quarantine.
- If you were tested but had **no known exposure** to a confirmed case, and you are symptomatic, you may have another respiratory pathogen that is circulating in the community. Avoid work and group settings until three days after the last day of your respiratory symptoms and fever.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, visit <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

The latest information on the coronavirus in the U.S. and worldwide can be found on the [CDC website](#).