Public Health & Social Services

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LEWIS COUNTY
Washington's First County
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COVID-19 Return-to-Work Guidance for Employers

During this COVID-19 pandemic, how do you know when it is safe to allow employees back to work after being exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19? This guidance will help you determine when it is safe for employees to return to work, answer frequently asked questions, and provide links to more resources about COVID-19.

General Guidance

If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19:

- They can return to work 10 days after their symptom onset as long as they haven't had a fever in the last 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications) and their symptoms are improving.
- If they never had symptoms, they can return 10 days after the date that they were tested for COVID-19.
- If they are severely ill or immuno-compromised, they may need to isolate for 20 days instead of 10.

If an employee has been exposed to someone with lab-confirmed COVID-19:

They can return to work 14 days after their last date of exposure as long as they never had symptoms or a positive test for COVID-19.

This general guidance does not apply to healthcare providers.

Frequently asked questions

If an employee is quarantining because they are a close contact of someone who was diagnosed with COVID-19, do their close contacts need to quarantine, too?

Their close contacts do not need to quarantine unless he/she tests positive. In other words, contacts of contacts do not need to quarantine.

How long do employees need to quarantine if someone in their household is diagnosed with COVID-19?

They are considered to have an ongoing exposure until the diagnosed person is no longer infectious, so they may be quarantining for up to 10 days while the person is still contagious and then their 14-day quarantine – a total of up to 24 days.

If an employee tests negative for COVID-19 while in quarantine, can they stop quarantining?

No. It may be too early for the test to detect the infection. People can spread the disease before they get symptoms or a positive test result.

If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, do they have to test negative to return to work?

We do not recommend that employers require testing before employees return to work because people may continue to test positive after they are no longer contagious. We (and CDC) recommend the time-based strategy outlined above.

Additional COVID-19 Resources

- Download a one-page companion document titled **Employer Symptom Decision Tree** which contains more guidance in easy-to-understand graphics, suitable for posting in the workplace.
- CDC return to work guidance
  https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-in-home-patients.html
- CDC - When You Can be Around Others After You Had or Likely Had Had COVID-19
  https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html
- DOH - Workplace and Employer Resources & Recommendations
  https://www.doh.wa.gov/coronavirus/workplace
- DOH - Checklist for Businesses with Suspected or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19
  https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Checklist-BusinessesSuspectedConfirmedCasesCOVID-19.pdf

This document is not intended to replace a clinician's judgement. Diagnosis and treatment should be supervised by a clinician.