What to do if you test positive for COVID-19

Summary of October 24, 2022 Changes

- Updated information about COVID-19 treatment
- Added information about using antigen testing to determine when to end isolation and remove your mask
- Added guidance on what to do if symptoms come back
- Updated information on when someone is potentially contagious
- Added guidance on notifying people you may have exposed to COVID-19

Introduction

If you test positive for COVID-19, you can help stop the spread of COVID-19 to others. Please follow the guidance below regarding treatment, isolation, and mask wearing. Please also follow any local health jurisdiction, workplace, business, or school policies for people who test positive for COVID-19, which may be more restrictive than WA State Department of Health guidance.

- 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 If you are staying or working in any of these congregate settings.

Determine whether you need treatment

If you test positive and are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19 because of your age or chronic medication conditions, treatments are available that can reduce your chances of being hospitalized or dying from the disease. Medications to treat COVID-19 must be prescribed by a healthcare provider and started as soon as possible after diagnosis to be effective. Contact a healthcare provider right away to determine if you are eligible for treatment, even if your symptoms are mild right now. Visit the DOH webpage for more information for you and your health care provider on specific COVID-19 therapeutics and how to access treatment.

Isolate at home

People who test positive for COVID-19 or those who have symptoms of COVID-19 and are awaiting test results should isolate at home away from others except to get medical care. People with COVID-19 can transmit it to others. Isolating at home helps keep other people from

getting sick. <u>You should isolate regardless of your vaccination status.</u> If a vaccinated person gets COVID-19, they can still transmit the infection to others, but being vaccinated for COVID-19 makes them much less likely to be hospitalized or die from COVID-19. Ask others to do your shopping or use a grocery delivery service. If you need food or other support while you isolate at home, Care Connect Washington is available. Call the COVID-19 Information hotline at 1-800-525-0127, then press #, or reach out to your Care Connect hub. Language assistance is available. Do not travel, go to work, school, child care, or public areas, or use public transportation, ridesharing, or taxis. During isolation:

- Separate as much as possible from others at home, including household members and pets, by staying in a specific room away from other people and using a separate bathroom, if possible. CDC has more information about COVID-19 and Animals.
- Wear a high quality mask or respirator if you must be around others at home or in public.
- Take steps to improve ventilation at home, if possible.
- Do not share personal household items, like cups, towels, and utensils.
- Monitor your symptoms. If you have an emergency warning sign (like trouble breathing), seek emergency medical care immediately.
- If you have a routine medical appointment (as opposed to emergency care), call before you go and tell your health care provider you have COVID-19 or are being evaluated for COVID-19.

How long do I need to isolate myself and wear a mask?

If you test positive for COVID-19, **stay home for at least 5 days and isolate from others in your home** in order to avoid spreading COVID-19 to others.

Ending Isolation

How long you should isolate depends on several factors:

- Whether you can wear a well-fitting mask,
- Whether you continue to test positive for COVID-19 during days 6-10 after 5 days of isolation,
- Whether you are severely ill with COVID-19 or have a weakened immune system, and
- Whether you are staying or working in a congregate setting.

If you tested positive for COVID-19 and had symptoms:

Isolate for at least **5 days** after your symptoms first appeared. You can leave isolation after 5 full days if:

- Your symptoms are improving 5 days after the start of your isolation, **AND**
- You have not had a fever for 24 hours without use of fever reducing-medication

If you tested positive for COVID-19 but have not had any symptoms: Isolate for at least **5 days** after you tested positive for COVID-19. You can leave isolation after 5 full days if you have not developed any symptoms.

If you develop symptoms after testing positive, your 5-day isolation should start over. Follow the recommendations above for ending isolation if you had symptoms.

Regardless of when you end isolation, take the following steps for the 10 days after you developed symptoms (or tested positive, if you never developed symptoms):

- Wear a well-fitting and high-quality mask or respirator around others at home and in public for at least 5 additional days (day 6 through day 10) after the end of your 5-day isolation period.
- Avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, and do not go to healthcare facilities (including nursing homes) and other high-risk settings.
- Do not go to places where you are unable to wear a mask, such as restaurants and some gyms, and avoid eating around others at home and at work.
- If symptoms recur or worsen, you should restart your isolation period at day 0.
- See Travel | CDC for information on travel.

How to calculate your isolation period:

If you have symptoms, day 0 is your first day of symptoms. Day 1 is the first full day after your symptoms developed.

If you have not had any symptoms, day 0 is the date you were tested. Day 1 is the first full day after the specimen was collected for your positive test.

See the DOH Isolation and Quarantine Calculator tool for assistance.

Removing your mask

You may remain contagious after 5 days of isolation. Continue to wear a well-fitting and high quality mask or respirator around others at home and in public for 5 additional days (day 6 through day 10) after the end of your 5-day isolation period. Alternatively, consider using antigen testing to determine when to remove your mask (see below). If you are unable to wear a well-fitting mask, you should continue to isolate for a full 10 days.

Consistent mask use means wearing a well-fitting and high-quality mask or respirator whenever you are around others inside or outside the home. You should not engage in activities around others at times when you cannot wear a mask, such as sleeping, eating, or swimming. Mask alternatives (such as a face shield with a drape) do not provide as much protection as a well-fitting and high-quality mask. If you are not able to wear a well-fitting mask, you should isolate for 10 days.

Using antigen testing to determine when to leave isolation and remove your mask

If you have access to an antigen test, you can further decrease your risk of infecting others by taking a test when you plan to leave isolation, no sooner than day 6. Only start testing if you are fever free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medication and your other symptoms have improved. Loss of taste or smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and should not delay the end of isolation.

- If your test is positive, you are likely still contagious. You should continue to isolate and wear a mask and wait 24-48 hours to test again.
- If you test negative on two sequential tests each performed 24-48 hours apart, you can end isolation and stop wearing a mask before day 10.

If you continue to test positive on repeat testing through 10 days, you should continue to wear a mask and avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease until you receive two sequential negative antigen test results.

If you are severely ill with COVID-19 or have a weakened immune system:

People who are severely ill with COVID-19 (including those who were hospitalized or required intensive care or ventilation support) and people with compromised immune systems should isolate for at least 10 days and up to 20 days. They may also require testing with a viral test to determine when they can be around others. Consult with your healthcare provider about when you can resume being around other people. See the therapeutics section above for information about treatments and medications that you may qualify for.

If you are staying or working in any of these congregate settings:

People who live or work in the following congregate setting should follow the isolation recommendations as outlined below.

- Correctional or detention facility
- Homeless shelter or transitional housing
- Commercial maritime setting (e.g., commercial seafood vessels, cargo ships, cruise ships)
- Crowded work setting where physical distancing is not possible due to the nature of the work, such as in warehouses, factories, and food packaging and meat processing facilities
- Temporary worker housing

If you tested positive for COVID-19 and had symptoms, you can end isolation from the congregate setting after **10 days** have gone by since your symptoms first appeared if:

- You have not had a fever for 24 hours without use of fever reducing-medication, **AND**
- Your symptoms have improved.

If you tested positive for COVID-19, but have not had any symptoms, you can end isolation from the congregate setting after **10 days** have gone by since you tested positive for COVID-19 if you have not developed symptoms. If you develop symptoms after testing positive, your 10-day isolation from this setting should start over. Follow the recommendations above for ending isolation if you had symptoms.

If you have symptoms, day 0 is your first day of symptoms. Day 1 is the first full day after your symptoms developed. If you have not had any symptoms, day 0 is the date you were tested. Day 1 is the first full day after the specimen was collected for your positive test.

If you work but do not live in the congregate setting, do not go to the workplace for a full 10 days and follow the shortened home isolation guidance above.

During periods of critical staffing shortages, correctional facilities, detention facilities, homeless shelters, transitional housing, and critical infrastructure workplaces may consider shortening the isolation period for staff to ensure continuity of operations. Decisions to shorten isolation in these settings should be made in consultation with the local health jurisdiction.

What should I do if my symptoms come back?

After you have ended isolation, if your COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen, restart your isolation at day 0 and follow the How long do I need to isolate myself and wear a mask? above. Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions about your symptoms or when to end isolation.

When am I potentially contagious and exposing others?

People with COVID-19 can spread the virus to other people starting two days before they develop symptoms (or 2 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 who tested positive for COVID-19 receives two sequential negative COVID-19 antigen tests 24-48 hours apart when feeling better after at least 5 days of isolation, they are no longer considered to be contagious. If a person'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.

Notify people you may have exposed

Tell your close contacts they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and send them What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19. Being a close contact generally means a person has 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, poor ventilation or performing activities such as shouting or singing, there is still a risk for infecting others even if they are more than 6 feet away from you. If you were at work when you were potentially contagious, inform your employer so they can notify co-workers. Employers are required to notify employees who were exposed to COVID-19 at work while maintaining confidentiality of the person with COVID-19.

If you use WA Notify and test positive for COVID-19, you can use WA Notify to anonymously alert other users you may have exposed. This will allow people using the app who were potentially exposed to take precautions to protect themselves and the people around them. If you test positive with a self-test or were tested for COVID-19 through a lab or provider-based testing service, and have not received a verification code text message from DOH, you can request a verification code in WA Notify. No personal or identifiable information is collected or shared when you use WA Notify. To request a verification code:

1. Using your mobile device (Android or iPhone), scan the QR code or [request a verification code](#):

2. Enter the phone number of your device that uses WA Notify and the date of your positive COVID-19 test.
3. Select "Continue."

If you are unable to request a verification code in WA Notify, you should call the state COVID-19 hotline, 1-800-525-0127, then press #, and let the hotline staff know that you are a WA Notify user. The hotline staff can provide you with a verification link you can use to alert other WA Notify users that they may have been exposed.

Please visit the "[How to notify others if you test positive for COVID-19 with a self-test](#)" section on [WANotify.org](#) for more information. If you would like to learn more about WA Notify, including how to add it to your phone, visit [WANotify.org](#).

Participate in a public health interview

An interviewer from public health may contact you if you test positive for COVID-19, usually by phone. The interviewer will help you understand what to do next and what support is available. The interviewer will ask for the names and contact information of people you have had close contact with recently to notify them about exposure. They ask for this information so they can notify people who may have been exposed. The interviewer will not share your name with your close contacts.

If you tested positive using a self-test

Please see [Interim SARS-CoV-2 Self-Testing Guidance](#) for more information.

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.

More COVID-19 information and resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [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 only accurate information to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak (COVID-19)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response (COVID-19)](#)
- [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.