

## **Isolation Guidance: For People with Confirmed COVID-19 or Symptoms of COVID-19**

This guidance provides instructions for isolation of people who have confirmed or suspected COVID-19. Isolation continues to be an important way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to your friends, family, and community. This guidance does not apply to healthcare facilities, homeless shelters, or correctional facilities<sup>1</sup>.

### **Isolate (regardless of your vaccination status or your COVID-19 history) if:**

- **You have symptoms of COVID-19**
  - Isolate and get tested. If your COVID-19 test is negative, you can come out of isolation as long as you are feeling better.
- OR
- **You have confirmed COVID-19**

### **When you are isolating:**

- **Stay at home except to get medical care:**
  - People with COVID-19 are encouraged to speak to their healthcare provider **right away** about possible treatments.
  - Do not participate in public activities or gatherings (e.g., grocery shopping, places of worship, parties, etc.).
  - Do not leave home to go to work or school.
  - Work from home (telework) or utilize sick leave if possible.
  - If you are a student, make alternate arrangements to obtain class materials.
- **Separate yourself from other people and pets** in your home as much as possible during your isolation period.
  - Avoid physical contact.
  - Stay in a separate “sick room” (e.g., bedroom) or area within the home and use a separate bathroom, if possible.
  - If you have pets, have someone else take care of them while you are isolating.
- **Do not share personal items** (e.g., dishes, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or electronics like cell phones) with others while you are isolating. After you use these items, they should be cleaned and disinfected as appropriate.
- **Wear a well-fitting mask<sup>2</sup>** if you **must** be around other people in your home, and if you need to leave your home for medical care. If you are not able to wear a mask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then others should wear respirators or masks if they need to be around you.
- **Take steps to improve ventilation in your home** (e.g., opening doors and windows, turning on fans).

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<sup>1</sup> For isolation guidance in healthcare settings, please refer to *Guidance for Healthcare Personnel Monitoring, Restriction, and Return to Work* and *Guidance on Discontinuation of Transmission-Based Precautions for Patients with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance). For isolation guidance for homeless shelters and correctional facilities, please refer to [Guidance on Management of COVID-19 in Homeless Service Sites and in Correctional and Detention Facilities | CDC](#).

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see *Mask and Respirator Guidance* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

- **Avoid visitors who do not have an essential need to be in your home.** Especially avoid having visitors who are immunocompromised<sup>3</sup>, unvaccinated, not up to date<sup>4</sup> on their COVID-19 vaccine, or at high risk for severe COVID-19 (including people older than 65)<sup>5</sup>.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a lined trash can and immediately wash your hands.
- **Clean your hands frequently.** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty.
- **Monitor your symptoms.** Contact your healthcare provider for any symptom that is severe or concerning. If you have an emergency warning sign (like trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in your chest, pale gray or bluish lips or face, confusion, or loss of consciousness), call 911 (or someone with you should call 911).

### Instructions for isolation:

#### How to count isolation days:

- If you had symptoms:
  - **Day 0** is the day your symptoms started<sup>6</sup>.
  - **Day 1** is the first full day after symptoms started,
- If you had no symptoms (“asymptomatic infection”):
  - **Day 0** is the day you were tested.
  - **Day 1** is the first full day after you were tested.

#### For people age 2 and older:

- **Your minimum length of isolation is 5 full days.**
    - A 5-day isolation period (i.e., you may come out of isolation on **Day 6**) can be used if:
      - You had asymptomatic infection.
- OR**
- You had **mild COVID-19 illness AND** you have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-lowering medications like Tylenol or ibuprofen **AND** your other symptoms are improving<sup>7</sup>.
- ❖ **You likely had mild COVID-19<sup>8</sup> if:**

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<sup>3</sup> **Immunocompromised** means having a weakened immune system due to a medical condition or from taking medications that suppress the immune system. This includes, but is not limited to: people on chemotherapy, people with blood cancers like leukemia, people who have had an organ transplant or stem cell transplant, and people on dialysis.

<sup>4</sup> For information about staying up to date on your COVID-19 vaccine, see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html).

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see *People with Certain Medical Conditions* at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).

<sup>6</sup> *As an example*, John starts feeling sick at 10 pm on October 15. October 15 is his Day 0 and October 16 is his Day 1.

<sup>7</sup> Symptoms of altered taste and smell may continue for weeks to months after recovery from COVID-19 and these symptoms do not need to keep you in isolation.

<sup>8</sup> If you are unsure about how mild or severe your case of COVID-19 was, or how long you should isolate, ask your healthcare provider, and follow their advice.

- You were able to recover at home taking only over-the-counter medications.
- You did not develop shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- **For people who have mild illness:** If you still have a fever and/or other symptoms have not improved at Day 5, stay in isolation until you are fever-free for 24 hours and your other symptoms have improved. Alternatively, you can complete a 10-day isolation period.
- **For people who have asymptomatic infection:** If you develop symptoms at any time while you are isolating, start the clock again, set **Day 0** as the day your symptoms started, and follow isolation instructions for people who have symptoms.

**For children younger than age 2:**

- Because they are too young to wear masks, standard length of isolation is **10 days**.

**For anyone who had moderate COVID-19 illness:**

- Isolate for **10 days**.
- You were sick with moderate COVID-19<sup>8</sup> if:
  - You experienced shortness of breath or had difficulty breathing but did not need to go to the ER or get admitted to the hospital.

**For anyone who had severe or critical COVID-19 illness OR who is immunocompromised:**

- People who had severe or critical COVID-19 or who are immunocompromised should isolate for **at least 10 days** and may require testing to be cleared from isolation. *Consult your healthcare provider before ending isolation.*
- You had severe or critical COVID-19<sup>8</sup> if:
  - You had dangerously low oxygen levels or serious trouble breathing.
  - You were sick enough to go to the ER or were admitted to the hospital.

**If people age 2 and older come out of isolation after less than 10 days, they should do the following through Day 10:**

- **Continue to wear a well-fitting mask when around other people (at home and in public) through Day 10.**
  - **Exception:** Your mask may be removed sooner than day 10 if:
    - You have completed a full 5 days of isolation **AND** you have **TWO** negative COVID-19 antigen tests at least 48 hours apart.
      - ❖ **NOTE:** If your antigen test is positive, you may still be contagious. Continue wearing a mask and wait at least 48 hours before repeating the test. Continue taking antigen tests at least 48 hours apart until you have 2 negative tests in a row. **This may mean you have to continue wearing a mask and testing beyond Day 10.**
  - If you are unable to wear a mask, isolate for 10 days **OR** until the above criteria are met.
- Separate from other people at home or in public as much as possible during times when masks are removed. (e.g., when eating or napping).
- Avoid being around people who are immunocompromised, unvaccinated, not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine, or at high risk for severe COVID-19 (including people older than 65)<sup>4</sup>.
- Avoid visiting nursing homes.

- Avoid going to public places where you will need to remove your mask (e.g., restaurants, bars)
- Avoid travel.
- Continue monitoring yourself for symptoms of COVID-19. If symptoms appear, recur, or worsen, restart your isolation at day 0 and consult with your healthcare provider as needed.

The guidelines above will continue to be updated as the outbreak evolves. Please visit [coronavirus.dc.gov](https://coronavirus.dc.gov) regularly for the most current information.