

## **Guidance for Isolation: People who Test Positive for COVID-19 (and Their Household Members and Caregivers)**

This guidance provides instructions for people who have a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 and for household members of people with confirmed COVID-19. This guidance does not apply to health care facilities, homeless shelters, or correctional facilities. Guidance for these settings can be found at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

### **For people who test positive for COVID-19:**

- People who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate themselves regardless of whether they have symptoms and regardless of their vaccination status<sup>1</sup>.
- People at home with COVID-19 are encouraged to speak to their healthcare provider about possible treatment with **antiviral medication** or **monoclonal antibodies**.

### **HOW TO ISOLATE:**

Take the steps below to isolate yourself from others to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to your friends, family, and community.

- **Stay at home except to get medical care:**
  - 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. Notify your employer or school that you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 so that they can initiate any necessary actions to limit spread of COVID-19 at your work location.
  - 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 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.
- **Prohibit visitors who do not have an essential need to be in your home.** Especially avoid having visitors who are immunocompromised<sup>2</sup>, unvaccinated, not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine, or at high risk for severe COVID-19<sup>3</sup>.
  - **NOTE: A person is considered up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine after they have received all recommended doses, including booster doses as applicable.**
    - This includes unboosted people 12 and older who completed their primary

<sup>1</sup> **Exception:** People who test positive with a NAAT (nucleic acid amplification test e.g., PCR) test who have recovered from a confirmed COVID-19 infection within the past 90 days **AND** do not have any symptoms of COVID<sup>1</sup> do not need to isolate. NAAT testing should not be used in this setting since a positive result is likely due to prolonged shedding of virus that is not able to cause infection. **People with a history of COVID-19 who develop symptoms of COVID-19 again should isolate and follow-up with their healthcare provider to be evaluated for possible reinfection.**

<sup>2</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>3</sup> For more information, see *Guidance for People at Higher Risk for Severe COVID-19* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance)

vaccine series<sup>4</sup>:

- ❖ Less than 5 months ago (for the mRNA vaccines: Pfizer or Moderna)
- ❖ Less than 2 months ago (for the J&J vaccine)
- Up to date also includes children age 5 to 11 who have completed a primary vaccine series but are not yet eligible for a booster dose.
- For detailed 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).
- **Wear a well-fitting mask** if you need to 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 it is essential for people to wear respirators or masks if they need to be around you<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**

- Consult with your healthcare provider if you have not yet been medically evaluated (i.e., if you were tested at a free public health site).
  - Reschedule non-essential medical appointments.
  - Call ahead before visiting your doctor and let them know that you have COVID-19.
- Contact your healthcare provider for any symptom that is severe or concerning.
- **Call 911 (or someone with you should call 911) if you are having a medical emergency**, such as trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in your chest, pale gray or bluish lips or face, confusion, or loss of consciousness. Let dispatch personnel know that you have COVID-19.
- Visits to a healthcare facility for any reason should be via medical transport (e.g., ambulance) or private vehicle (not public transportation).

### **STANDARD ISOLATION PROTOCOLS:**

***For children younger than age 2 AND anyone age 2 and older who is unable to consistently wear a mask when around other people:***

- Standard duration of isolation is 10 days.

***For people age 2 and older who are able to consistently wear a mask when around other people):***

- **IF: You were sick with mild to moderate COVID-19**<sup>6</sup>
  - You likely had mild or moderate COVID-19 if:
    - You were able to recover at home taking over-the-counter medications or oral prescription medications.
    - You did not need major medical intervention during your illness.
    - You did not require emergency room visits or admission to a hospital.

<sup>4</sup> The initial vaccine course before any extra (i.e., “booster”) doses

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see *Mask and Respirator Guidance* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://www.coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance).

<sup>6</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 did not develop severe breathing trouble.

OR

- **IF: You had COVID-19 without any symptoms (“asymptomatic infection”)**
  - **Your minimum duration of isolation is 5 full days.** (Count **Day 0** as the date your symptoms started and **Day 1** as the first full day after symptoms started. For example, Candace starts feeling sick at 10 pm on January 15. January 15 is her Day 0 and January 16 is her Day 1)
    - A 5-day isolation period can be used if:
      - ❖ A COVID-19 antigen test done on **Day 5** is negative **AND**
      - ❖ **for people who had symptoms:** 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>.
      - ❖ **If these conditions apply, you may come out of isolation on Day 6.**
      - ❖ **Continue to wear a well-fitting mask when around other people through Day 10. A negative COVID-19 antigen test does not guarantee that you are not infectious to others, so continuing to wear a mask is essential.**
      - ❖ If you are unable to wear a mask, isolate for 10 days.
      - ❖ If the antigen test is **positive**, stay in isolation.
      - ❖ If no antigen test is done, you must isolate for 10 days.
      - ❖ **For people who have symptoms:** 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. Then you may check a COVID-19 antigen test and come out of isolation if your test is negative. 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 anyone who had severe or critical COVID-19 illness OR who is immunocompromised:***

- You had severe or critical COVID-19<sup>6</sup> if:
  - You became sicker than the description of mild to moderate COVID-19 above.
  - You had dangerously low oxygen, or serious trouble breathing.
  - You needed more intensive medical attention such as a trip to the ER, admission to the hospital, admission to an intensive care unit, or required mechanical ventilation or “life support” for any amount of time.
- People who had severe or critical COVID-19 or who are immunocompromised should isolate for **at least 10 and up to 20 days** and may require testing to be cleared from isolation. If you fall into one of these categories, consult with your healthcare provider and follow their advice.

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

<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.

- **Continue wearing a well-fitting mask around other people at home and in public**
  - **People who are unable to wear a mask when around others must isolate for a full 10 days.**
- Keep at least 6 feet of distance 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>3</sup>.
- Avoid visiting nursing homes.
- Do not go to public places where you will need to remove your mask (e.g., restaurants, bars)
- Eat separately from other people including household members.
- Avoid travel.
- Continue monitoring yourself for symptoms of COVID-19. If symptoms appear, recur, or worsen: isolate, repeat testing and consult with your healthcare provider as needed.

### **For household members of people with COVID-19:**

- If you are a household member of a person with COVID-19, you are considered an **exposed close contact** and should quarantine unless you meet quarantine exception criteria. For detailed information, please see *Guidance for Close Contacts of a Person Confirmed to have COVID-19: Quarantine and Testing* at [coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/healthguidance). (Please pay special attention to quarantine instructions for household members on pages 3 and 4 of the guidance.)

### **PROTECT YOURSELF:**

- **Limit contact** with the person who tested positive for COVID-19.
  - Try to stay at least 6 feet away from the person with COVID-19 during their isolation period. The person with COVID-19 should stay in a separate room or area of the home if possible and eat their meals in that space as well.
  - If you have to share space, make sure the room has good ventilation by opening windows and doors as much as possible, or turning on a fan.
- **Wear a well-fitting respirator (i.e., KN95)** if you have to be around the person with COVID-19<sup>5</sup>.
- **Avoid** sharing household items with the person with COVID-19 (e.g., kitchenware, towels, bedding, electronics.).
- **Avoid** having visitors while a sick person is isolating and while household members are quarantining. Especially avoid having visitors who are immunocompromised, who are at higher risk for severe COVID-19<sup>3</sup>, who are unvaccinated or not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine.
- **Wash** your hands frequently. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

### **TAKING CARE OF A PERSON WITH COVID-19:**

- No more than one person in the household should provide care to the person with COVID-19, to limit exposure of household members to the virus.
- People who are unvaccinated, not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine, or who are immunocompromised should not provide care to people with COVID-19.
- Help them with grocery shopping, filling their prescriptions, and getting other household supplies.
- Take care of their pets and limit contact between pets and the person sick with COVID-19.
- Have their healthcare provider's contact information at hand. Monitor the person with COVID-19 for signs that they are getting sicker and call their healthcare provider if necessary. Signs of a medical emergency include: trouble breathing, persistent chest pain or pressure, pale gray or

bluish lips or face, confusion, or inability to wake or stay awake. If they have a medical emergency, call 911, and inform dispatch personnel that the person has COVID-19.

- Put on a well-fitting respirator before entering the sick person's room and ask them to put a mask on before you enter<sup>5</sup>.
- Wear disposable gloves in the following situations:
  - When there is potential contact with the sick person's blood or other body fluids
  - When handling trash
  - When handling the sick person's dirty laundry
  - When handling the sick person's used kitchenware (e.g., plates, cups, utensils)
- Perform hand hygiene immediately after removing gloves and dispose of gloves in a lined trashcan.
- **Clean and disinfect** frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home at least daily. High touch surfaces include: doorknobs, tables, handles, light switches, phones, remote controls, and countertops. Make sure you clean visible dirt before you disinfect. Wear gloves if needed for the cleaning and disinfecting products used.
  - If they feel up to it, the person who is sick can clean their own space. Provide them with personal cleaning supplies such as tissues, paper towels, cleaners, and disinfectant.
  - Laundry: the sick person's laundry can be washed together with other people's items. Wash laundry on the warmest permissible setting. Wear a mask as well as gloves when handling the sick person's laundry.
  - For more information about cleaning and disinfecting in the home, see [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/cleaning-disinfection.html).

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