

## **Guidance for Isolation: People who test positive for COVID-19**

This guidance provides instructions for people who have 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 with COVID-19:**

- People who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate themselves regardless of whether they have symptoms and regardless of their vaccination status.
- People at home with COVID-19 are encouraged to speak to their healthcare provider about possible treatments for COVID-19.
  - For more information on treatments for COVID-19 available in DC, visit [coronavirus.dc.gov/page/covid-19-therapeutics](https://coronavirus.dc.gov/page/covid-19-therapeutics).

### **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.
  - 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.
- **Avoid visitors who do not have an essential need to be in your home.** Especially avoid having visitors who are immunocompromised<sup>1</sup>, unvaccinated, not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine, or at high risk for severe COVID-19 (including people older than 65)<sup>2</sup>.
  - See [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html) for the current definition of what it means to be up to date on the COVID-19 vaccine.
- **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 people should wear respirators or masks if they need to be around you<sup>3</sup>
- **Take steps to improve ventilation in your home** (e.g., opening doors and windows, turning on fans).
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough

<sup>1</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>2</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://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html).

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see *Masks* at [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/masks.html](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/masks.html).

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.
  - **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.

## **ISOLATION PROTOCOLS:**

### ***For children younger than age 2:***

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

### ***For people age 2 and older with asymptomatic (without any symptoms) or mild COVID-19 illness:***

- **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 September 15. September 15 is her Day 0 and September 16 is her Day 1)
  - 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>4</sup>.
      - ❖ **You likely had mild COVID-19<sup>5</sup> if:**
        - You were able to recover at home taking only over-the-counter medications.
        - You did not develop shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- **Continue to wear a well-fitting mask when around other people through Day 10.**
  - **Exception:** Your mask may be removed sooner than day 10 if:
    - You have **TWO** negative COVID-19 antigen tests at least 48 hours apart.
    - AND**
    - You have completed a full 5 days of isolation.
  - If you are unable to wear a mask, isolate for 10 days **OR** until the above criteria is met.
  - If antigen tests are positive, continue wearing a mask through day 10.
- **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.

<sup>4</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>5</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.

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

- Isolate for **10 days**.
- **You were sick with moderate COVID-19<sup>5</sup> if:**
  - You became sicker than the description of mild COVID-19 above.
  - You were able to recover at home but required prescription medication.
  - You experienced shortness of breath or had difficulty breathing.
  - Your symptoms were bad enough to require a visit to your healthcare provider, but not bad enough require a visit to the ER or admission to the hospital.

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

- **You had severe or critical COVID-19<sup>5</sup> if:**
  - You became sicker than the description of mild or moderate COVID-19 above.
  - You had dangerously low oxygen, or serious trouble breathing.
  - You needed a higher level of medical care 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:***

- **Continue wearing a well-fitting mask around other people at home and in public unless you have TWO negative COVID-19 antigen tests at least 48 hours apart.**
- 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>2</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: isolate, repeat testing 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.