

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.

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.

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 immunocompromised¹, unvaccinated, not up to date on their COVID-19 vaccine, or at high risk for severe COVID-19 (including people older than 65)².
 - See 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 you³
- **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

¹ **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

² For more information, see *People with Certain Medical Conditions* at cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html.

³ For more information, see *Masks* at 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 improving⁴.
 - ❖ **You likely had mild COVID-19⁵ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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-19⁵ 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-19⁵ 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)².
- 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 regularly for the most current information.