

UPDATE: COVID-19 Guidance Update for the General Population

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TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Dr. Denise A. Johnson, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	COVID-19 Guidance Update for the General Population
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This transmission is a “Health Update,” provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

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- Individuals who are exposed to COVID-19 are recommended to wear a high-quality mask for 10 days and get tested on day 6 after exposure.
- Quarantine for individuals who are exposed is no longer recommended.
- This is intended to replace [PA-HAN-619](#).
- If you have questions about this guidance, please call your local health department or **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) provides this guidance based on available information about COVID-19 and is subject to change.

On August 11, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) clarified their [guidelines for isolation](#) and [quarantine](#) periods for the general public. Based on these updated recommendations, the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is updating guidance for individuals infected with and exposed to COVID-19. This guidance provides clarification on quarantine guidance. This guidance applies to the general population in the community setting. This guidance does NOT apply to healthcare workers or healthcare settings.

DOH recommends all Pennsylvanians use the CDC's [COVID-19 Community Levels](#) to inform what prevention actions they should take depending on the amount of COVID-19 circulating in their community. Staying up to date on vaccinations and taking additional prevention actions (e.g., improving ventilation, wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, avoiding non-essential indoor activities) based on community risk level (e.g., their own health status, health status of household contacts), are important for protecting individual health and the health of others, especially those at [high risk of serious illness](#).

Currently authorized vaccines in the United States are highly effective at protecting vaccinated people against symptomatic and severe COVID-19. CDC [recommends](#) COVID-19 primary series vaccines for everyone ages 6 months and older, and COVID-19 boosters for everyone ages 5 years and older, if eligible. Additionally, adults 50 years of age or older and people 12 years of age and older who are moderately or severely [immunocompromised](#) should receive a second booster, if eligible.

Guidance for Individuals Exposed to COVID-19

For persons who have been [exposed](#) to COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status:

- Quarantining at home is no longer necessary
- They should wear a high-quality [mask](#) for 10 days after the exposure occurred (day 0 is the day the exposure occurred) whenever they are around others inside their home or indoors in public
 - If someone is unable to mask and for children <2 years, other prevention actions should be taken, including additional physical distancing and increased ventilation. Exposed persons who develop symptoms should be tested promptly.
- They should watch for symptoms to develop for 10 days after the exposure
 - [Symptoms](#) include fever, cough, shortness of breath
 - If symptoms develop, the person should isolate immediately, get [tested](#), and stay home until the results come in
 - If the test result is positive, the person should follow the [isolation](#) recommendations
- Exposed people should take [extra precautions](#) if the person is around someone who is at [high risk](#) for severe illness from COVID-19
- They should get tested at least 5 full days after the last exposure
 - Testing should occur regardless of the presence of symptoms
 - If the test is negative, continue to wear a mask around others while indoors and monitor for symptoms
 - If the test is positive, the person should isolate immediately and follow guidance for individuals who test positive for COVID-19
- People can develop COVID-19 up to 10 days after being exposed. It is important to continue to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 and wear a mask for 10 days after the exposure. If symptoms develop at any time during those 10 days, they should isolate immediately, get [tested](#), and stay home until the results come in.

Guidance for Individuals Who Test Positive for COVID-19

People who test positive for COVID-19 should stay home for at least 5 days (day 0 is the day symptoms began) and [isolate](#) from others in their home, if feasible. Because people with COVID-19 are likely most infectious during those first 5 days, it is also recommended to:

- Wear a high-quality [mask](#) if you must be around others at home
- Avoid travel
- Separate from others as much as possible
- Use a separate bathroom, if possible
- Take steps to improve ventilation at home, if possible
- Not share personal household items, like cups, towels, and utensils
- Monitor symptoms. If they have an emergency warning sign (like trouble breathing), they should seek emergency medical care immediately.

For people with mild, symptomatic COVID-19, isolation can end 5 days after symptom onset (day 0 is the day symptoms began), provided:

- Any fever that was present has ended at least 24 hours prior (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and symptoms are improving, and
- They continue to properly wear a high-quality [mask](#) around others for 5 more days after the 5-day isolation period.
- They make efforts to avoid being around people who are more likely to develop severe illness from COVID-19 until after day 10.
- If you had mild illness, you may remove your mask sooner than day 10 if you have two sequential negative antigen tests taken 48 hours apart.
 - If either test result is positive, persons should continue to wear a mask around others and continue testing every 48 hours until they have two sequential negative results or until the 10 days is complete.
 - Some individuals may continue to test positive for extended period of time. If someone continues to have persistent positive test results but they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and all other symptoms are improving, isolation can be discontinued after day 10.

For people who test positive and are asymptomatic, isolation can end 5 days after the first positive test (day 0 is the day the sample for the test was collected), provided:

- They can continue to wear a high-quality [mask](#) around others for 5 more days after the 5-day isolation period (total of 10 days from the day sample was collected).
- If symptoms develop after a positive test, their 5-day isolation period should start over (day 0 changes to the first day of symptoms).
- They make efforts to avoid being around people who are more likely to develop severe illness from COVID-19 until after day 10.
- If you had no symptoms, you may remove your mask sooner than day 10 if you have two sequential negative antigen tests taken 48 hours apart.
 - If either test result is positive, persons should continue to wear a mask around others and continue testing every 48 hours until they have two sequential negative results or until the 10 days is complete.
 - Some individuals may continue to test positive for extended period of time. If someone continues to have persistent positive test results but they have been asymptomatic for the full 10 days, isolation can be discontinued after day 10

For people who have [moderate](#) COVID-19 illness (i.e., shortness of breath, difficulty breathing), or [severe](#) illness (i.e., you were hospitalized), or a weakened immune system, they should isolate for the full 10 days.

For people with severe illness or a weakened immune system, they should consult their healthcare provider before ending is isolation. Ending isolation without a viral test may not be an option for you.

If you have questions about this guidance, please call your local health department or **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**. Individuals interested in receiving further PA-HANs are encouraged to register at <https://han.pa.gov/>.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of August 18, 2022 but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.