Who Needs to Quarantine After Exposure to COVID-19?

Anyone* who was in close contact with a person with COVID-19 should quarantine and get tested to prevent further spread in the community.

A close contact is any individual who was within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes total during a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before the person with COVID-19 got sick (or 2 days before they tested positive if the person doesn’t have symptoms), regardless of whether masks were worn.

Close contacts should quarantine by staying home (except to get tested), avoiding close contact with others in the home, and monitoring for symptoms.

*Individuals without symptoms who meet one of the following criteria do NOT have to quarantine but should still self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 for 14 days following an exposure:
  - Fully vaccinated individuals (i.e., got the second dose of a 2-dose vaccine or got the single dose of a single-dose vaccine 2 weeks ago or longer) should mask in public for 14 days after exposure, and testing is recommended 3-5 days after exposure, even if there are no symptoms.
  - Individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 90 days

See “Exception to Quarantine for Childcare/K-12 Educational Settings” for additional guidance specific to school settings.

How Long Should I Quarantine After Exposure to COVID-19?

The recommended quarantine period is 14 days.
- This timeframe results in the lowest risk for spread of COVID-19.
- 14-day quarantine should still always be used in congregate living facilities, including nursing homes, residential care facilities, shelters, and correctional facilities.

What are Other Options for Ending Quarantine?

Two alternative options to end the quarantine may be considered ONLY IF you are able to follow these strict precautions at ALL times:
- Monitoring closely for symptoms and isolating immediately if any symptoms develop
- Wearing a face covering at all times in public settings
- Practicing social distancing

Alternative 1: End quarantine after 10 days of quarantine AND you do not have any symptoms
- You are still at risk for developing and spreading COVID-19 and must still follow strict precautions for the full 14 days.

Alternative 2: End quarantine after 7 days of quarantine AND you do not have any symptoms AND you have had a negative antigen or PCR test no earlier than day 5 after last contact with the person who tested positive.
- A negative test does NOT rule out COVID-19 infection. PCR tests are more accurate tests.
- You are still at risk for developing and spreading COVID-19 and must still follow strict precautions for the full 14 days.

Additional quarantine restrictions may apply based on your occupation and your employer’s or institution’s policies (see the following sections “Considerations for Employers” and “Considerations for Educational Settings”).
Considerations for Employers

- 14-day quarantine period is still the recommendation from the CDC.
- The following employers should continue to employ a 14-day quarantine:
  - Employers with difficulty implementing and/or maintaining social distancing** and masking in the workplace
  - Congregate living settings (e.g., long-term care facilities, correctional facilities)
  - Other settings in which a shorter quarantine period results in unacceptably high risk for spread
- All other employers that choose to adopt one of the alternative options should ensure the following:
  - Clear process for ensuring that social distancing* and masking will be strictly followed for the entire 14 days following exposure
  - Clear policies regarding employees to not come to work if symptomatic
  - Sufficient resources to ensure frequent hand hygiene and cleaning/disinfecting surfaces occurs
- All employers should have strong masking policies in place and readily enforce them.

**Special considerations for PPE use in the healthcare setting may apply.

Considerations for Education Settings

- 14-day quarantine period is still the recommendation from the CDC.
- The following educational settings should continue to employ a 14-day quarantine:
  - Students or staff who live in congregate living settings (e.g., dormitories)
  - Educational institutions that will have difficulty implementing social distancing and masking
  - Childcare for age 3 and younger
  - Extracurricular activities (including athletics)
- All other educational settings can choose to adopt one of the alternative options only if the child/student/staff can follow these strict precautions at ALL times:
  - Monitoring closely for symptoms and isolating immediately if any symptoms develop
  - Wearing a face covering at all times during childcare/school setting
  - Practicing social distancing

Exception to Quarantine for Childcare/K-12 Education Settings

- Students who were less than 6 feet from an infected person do not need to quarantine if
  - Masks were worn appropriately and consistently by both individuals
  - Other prevention strategies were in place as recommended in the ChildCare/Strong Schools Toolkits
- Exception does NOT apply to teachers, staff, or other adults
- Exception does NOT apply to exposures during extracurricular/athletic activities

Where Can I Learn More About Quarantine or Other Questions?

Visit mecknc.gov/COVID or call 980-314-9400 for more information on quarantine recommendations, testing information, and other COVID-19 questions and concerns.