**Quarantine and Isolation Updates**

CDC Quarantine and Isolation Guidance is for INDIVIDUALS, not organizations. Therefore, while it is important to comply with the minimum guidance of the CDC in order to demonstrate that you are meeting general OSHA requirements of a safe work environment, your decision-making should be based on decisions about your willingness as a company to take risk, the needs of your business, and the safety of your work environment.

In general, having higher safety protocol than the CDC recommends for individuals is fine as long as the practices are consistently applied, and non-discriminatory.

**IMPORTANT MASKING UPDATES:**

* *Universal Masking is a recommended practice at this time.*
  + The CDC “continues to recommend wearing a mask in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high [community transmission](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view), ***regardless of vaccination status***.”It also states that **“The Omicron variant likely will spread more easily than the original SARS-CoV-2 virus... CDC expects that anyone with Omicron infection can spread the virus to others, even if they are vaccinated or don’t have symptoms.”**
  + Some counties/states/cities may have specific face covering requirements.
* *Educate your workforce on masks – many face coverings may be less effective with Omicron.*
  + The CDC has not updated their guidance on [well-fitting face coverings without vents](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html) to recommend N95 or K95 masks for general industry; however since Omicron is believed to multiply faster in the respiratory system, it may be that “regular masks” are less effective. (See <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2021/12/23/1066871176/mask-n95-omicron-contagious> and <https://www.acgih.org/covid-19-fact-sheet-worker-resp/)>
  + Some workers (particularly those at-risk or with family members who are) may choose to wear **a KN95 or N95 mask, or a surgical mask with a brace or close-fitting mask over it**. (Requiring such masks is likely not practical for general industry employers as OSHA has detailed respirator requirements. Voluntary mask opinion letter [here](https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/standardinterpretations/2018-04-26).)
  + Removing masks while eating, while alone in a restroom or driving in a car with others are common methods of spreading COVID-19 that employees should understand.
* *Enforce your safety practices and masking*

If staff are not complying with the Company’s established COVID protocols and policies (and there is not an applicable request for medical or religious exemptions) proceed with disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment (your safety policy should specifically refer to your disciplinary procedures). For additional information on accommodating religious and medical exemptions see <https://letscatapult.org/interactive-process-for-ada-and-religious-accommodations/> or contact Catapult’s Advice Team. Omicron is less likely to cause hospitalization or death than other variants but spreads more quickly, and as a result will impact hospital capacity. Using good safety practices can help support hospital capacity.

* *Educate your staff on vaccination and boosters***.**

If they get a vaccine and boosters, they will be highly protected against hospitalization and death, although they may still contract COVID-19 and spread it. Those who are in the hospital and dying are unvaccinated for the most part (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#covidnet-hospitalizations-vaccination>)

**COUNTING DAYS FOR QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION**

* (**As a reminder**, **isolation** is the term used when someone is positive for Covid-19; **quarantine** is the term used when someone has to stay at home due to exposure.)
* When counting days for isolation and quarantine:
  + The day of exposure is day ZERO for a quarantine situation. Day ONE is the day AFTER exposure.
  + The day that symptoms begin is day ZERO for an isolation situation. Day ONE is the day AFTER symptoms begin.
  + If asymptomatic, day ZERO is the day the employee took the test that was deemed positive. Day ONE is the day AFTER the test was taken.

**RECOMMENDED OPTIONS FOR COVID CASES AND CONTACT:**

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| **SYMPTOMS ONLY** | **ACTION TO BE TAKEN** |
| Your organization must determine whether based on symptoms and any close contact you will presume an employee is positive, or if you will be consistently mandating a trip to the doctor (pay for test and time). Be consistent. See symptoms list [here](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html).  Bear in mind that guidance is to assume COVID-19 without evidence of an alternative, particularly if spread is high. | If likely to be COVID-19, employee should self-isolate at home. We recommend you mandate the employee go to a medical provider for assessment/testing (pay for test and time) to confirm your diagnosis or simply presume positive.  You could choose to permit them to return to work after:  1) Their medical review deems them negative. We would not advise permitting a symptomatic individual to return solely based on a negative at-home test.  2) 10 days self-isolation, no ongoing symptoms or symptoms are resolving and they have had no fever for 24 hours (and no fever reducing medications).  **You may not delay 10-day return by requiring a negative test.**    If you have high risk-tolerance and are able to ensure a strong safety protocol/environment, you could align with current CDC individual guidelines:  CDC guidance for individuals is self-isolation for 5 days. If they meet the standard 24-hr symptom/fever review as above, they can end self-isolation and continue to mask for 5-days. If they choose to take a COVID test at day 5 and the test is positive, they should follow standard 10-day guidance as above. (Some companies may choose to request a negative COVID-19 test for return prior to 10-days). |
| **POSITIVE TEST** | **ACTION TO BE TAKEN** |
| Employee tests positive after exposure or on a regular testing protocol/other reason. | Same as above for a presumed positive due to symptoms. Immediately self-isolate; recommendation is for full 10 days as above. |

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| **CLOSE\* CONTACT*NO SYMPTOMS*** | **ACTION TO BE TAKEN** |
| Close\* contact with positive case  OR with a presumed positive case  (symptomatic and no alternative explanation for symptoms) | IN ALL CASES IF EMPLOYEE DEVELOPS SYMPTOMS, REVERT TO POSITIVE PROTOCOL IMMEDIATELY.  We would recommend choosing the most protective option that the CDC has provided that you feel will meet your risk tolerance while maintaining a safe working environment. Here are your options in order of most safe to least safe:   * 14-day full quarantine (no testing required) * 10-day quarantine (no testing required) * 7-day quarantine (if a test on day 5 is negative).   Current CDC options for individuals also include:   * Boosted or has completed Pfizer /Moderna full course within past 6 months or J&J past two months: Wear a mask around others for 10 days and the CDC recommends testing on day 5 if possible. * Anyone else (vaccinated or unvaccinated): Quarantine at home for 5 days. Continue to mask for 5 days more. Alternative (recommend against this option for risk mitigation) is to mask for 10 days if not possible to quarantine. Employee should test on day 5 if possible. |

\* CLOSE CONTACT is defined in different ways, but many companies consider under 6 feet for more than just a few minutes to be close contact (15 minutes is the CDC’s guidance). This does NOT have to be continuous contact. The CDC states that this contact may accrue to 15 minutes over any 24 hour period to count as close contact. Naturally, if the person sneezes/coughs on the contact, that could raise the level of concern even if contact is minimal otherwise.

\*\* LIMITATIONS ON RETURN-TO-WORK MEASURES RELATED TO POSITIVE CASES – In most cases the CDC does not permit having a more stringent symptom-based approach or test approach than the one here.  However, certain limited exceptions are made.  See [here](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html).

\*\*\* The CDC has provided [information](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html) to help companies integrate [workers in critical infrastructure](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA-Guidance-on-Essential-Critical-Infrastructure-Workers-1-20-508c.pdf) back into the workplace even when exposed; however, at this time the guidance is ARCHIVED as it may conflict with current CDC guidance. Therefore if you choose to take the risk to use this alternative, you should only take the option as a last resort.