

COVID-19 update: CDC updates return to work guidance, moves away from testing approach

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The CDC recently released updated its guidance on the criteria for determining when a worker diagnosed with COVID-19 may return to work. The interim guidance, [Discontinuation of Isolation for Persons with COVID-19 Not in Healthcare Settings \(July 20, 2020\)](#), is focused on when individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 may end home isolation. It is also incorporated into CDC's guidance for food companies managing return-to-work requirements for employees and contractors.

Most importantly, CDC has (1) moved away from using a test-based approach, and (2) has shortened the amount of time since symptom onset that a worker should wait. Companies should review the updated guidance in its entirety and consider whether their programs should be updated. The key changes include:

- **CDC No Longer Recommends a Test-Based Strategy.** CDC indicates that it no longer recommends using COVID-19 testing to discontinue a worker's isolation, except for unusual medical situations or instances in which isolation is to be discontinued earlier than under CDC's current symptom-based recommendations. If testing is used, CDC continues to recommend obtaining two consecutive negative tests collected more than 24 hours apart.
- **Updated Symptoms-Based Strategy.** CDC has modified its symptoms-based approach to shorten the timeframes. Under the updated recommendations, CDC advises that isolation can be discontinued when all of the following conditions are met:
 - At least 10 days have passed since symptom onset (*the previous recommendation was 14 days*); and
 - At least 24 hours have passed since the resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medicines (*the previous recommendation was 72 hours*); and
 - Other symptoms have improved.

CDC advises that individuals who never develop symptoms may discontinue isolation after 10 days of their first positive test.

CDC continues to recommend that individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19 (but who have not received a diagnosis) quarantine for 14 days after the exposure. Thus, under CDC's

updated recommendations, in theory a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 could return to work earlier than a person who was exposed.

It remains to be seen whether states or localities that followed the earlier CDC guidance will update their recommendations or requirements based on CDC's updated interim guidance.

If you have any questions about COVID-19 issues, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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