

El Paso County Public Health COVID-19 Workplace Guidance



What to do after employees who have COVID-19 have been in the workplace

El Paso County Public Health highly recommends the isolation of those who test positive and the quarantine of those who had close contact with an ill individual as an important tool to reduce further COVID-19 spread in a workplace and the community. Public Health recommends time-based methods for employers to determine when an employee may return to in-person work. Individuals who are fully vaccinated and not showing symptoms are not recommended to quarantine but should monitor for symptoms and test five to seven days after exposure.

Why am I receiving this communication?

El Paso County Public Health has identified a staff member who has worked in your facility that has tested positive for COVID-19. Public Health is requesting that you determine if any other employees have symptoms of COVID-19 and ask them to isolate for at least 10 days from the start of their symptoms. Employees who have been in close contact (see definition below) with ill staff members are highly recommended to quarantine for 14 days. Allowing staff who have been exposed to remain at home during this time will help prevent additional cases that would classify your facility as an outbreak.

Recommendations and guidance to share with employees who are diagnosed with COVID-19 or employees identified as a close contact:

Isolation

- Isolation is separating individuals who are sick with COVID-19 from individuals who are not sick.
- A person is highly recommended to isolate if:
 - They test positive for COVID-19 by PCR (nose swab). This is known as a confirmed case.
 - They test positive with an antigen test or they are suspected of having COVID-19 based on symptoms alone. This is known as a probable case.
- Positive COVID-19 cases are strongly encouraged to complete isolation. Cases are strongly encouraged to isolate until **all three** of the following criteria have been met:
 - 10 days have passed from the symptom onset date (or date of positive test if asymptomatic or symptom onset date is unknown)
 - **AND** fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine
 - **AND** improvement in symptoms
- Someone in isolation should stay home and away from others, including not going to work in an offsite location.

Quarantine

- Quarantine is strongly encouraged for individuals who were in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case but are not showing symptoms (asymptomatic). Quarantine options are below.

Length of quarantine?	Is testing required?	Who should use this option?
14 days	No	People who have regular close contact with high-risk individuals. This includes people who live or work in residential or congregate living facilities.
10 days	No	This quarantine period is appropriate for most people who do not have contact with high-risk individuals.
7 days	Yes	The 7-day quarantine with testing is the least preferred option and not recommended by EPCPH in most cases. People who do not have contact with high-risk individuals and have a negative test collected 48 hours before the quarantine is discontinued (on day 5 or later).

- Quarantine is not recommended for asymptomatic individuals in the following situations:
 - You are at least two weeks from your final vaccine dose
 - You are within 90 days of a COVID-19 infection
- Although not recommended to quarantine, individuals should monitor their symptoms for 14 days after exposure and continue to practice social distancing, avoid social groups and gatherings, and wear face masks at all times when in public places. Additionally, it is recommended to get tested for COVID-19 five to seven days after exposure.

Close contacts

- Close contacts of persons with confirmed or probable COVID-19 should self-quarantine from the time of their last contact with the person.
- Anyone who is a close contact should contact their primary care provider if they begin experiencing any symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, body aches, fatigue, loss of taste or smell, congestion, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea).

Who counts as a close contact?

- Anyone who was within six feet of someone who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes (total time over each 24 hour period) in the 48 hours prior to symptom onset thru the end of their isolation period.
- Anyone who provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19.
- Anyone who had direct physical contact with the sick person (touched, hugged, or kissed them).
- Anyone who shared eating or drinking utensils with the sick person.
- Anyone whom the sick person sneezed on, coughed on, or otherwise got respiratory droplets.

Contact tracing

- Contact tracing is conducted by Public Health staff to identify individuals who might have been exposed to someone known or suspected of having COVID-19. Close contacts are at risk of getting infected themselves.
- Contact tracing is a critical tool to help to slow the spread of COVID-19 by having close contacts self-quarantine away from others.
- Individuals who are contacted by Public Health about a positive test or potential exposure to COVID-19 should be reassured that their information is kept confidential.

- More information on what contact tracing is can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/contact-tracing.html>.

Repeat testing after someone tests PCR positive:

- Retesting of someone who previously tested PCR positive within the last 90 days is **not** recommended for the general public.
- If your employee has been isolated or quarantined by Public Health, they can return to work after meeting the time criteria in their quarantine or isolation letter. They do not need to test negative.
- Isolation periods should begin either on the date symptoms began or on the date of a positive test if asymptomatic, as defined in this document.
- There are some settings where repeat testing might be indicated, such as long-term care facilities, health care settings, or correctional settings.
- Note that insurance might not cover the cost of repeat testing.

Return to work strategies for employees who had COVID-19:

There are three strategies used to determine when a person with COVID-19 is ready to return to work (outside of their home) after being in isolation: Symptom-based, time-based, or test-based. Public Health does not recommend a test-based strategy for clearing employees to return to work and therefore information for that strategy is not included in this guidance. The time-based strategy is advised.

The decision of which strategy is used is ultimately up to an employer, as Public Health does not provide individual clearance for return to work.

Symptom-based

For persons with COVID-19 who had symptoms and tested positive OR only had COVID-19 symptoms, isolation may end when:

- At least 10 days have passed since their symptoms first appeared, AND
- At least 24 hours since fever resolved without using fever-reducing medication, AND
- At least 24 hours of symptom improvement (any COVID-19 symptoms)

Time-based

For persons who tested positive for COVID-19 but never had symptoms, isolation may end when:

- Ten days have passed since the testing date, provided no symptoms developed since their positive test. If they developed symptoms, then the symptom-based strategy should be used.

Reporting and mitigating outbreaks

Workplaces/facilities that suspect an outbreak (knowledge of five or more employees from a non-household group with confirmed COVID-19 or COVID-like illness, of at least one with a positive PCR test or antigen test, within a 14-day period) should immediately take the following actions:

- Contact Public Health at 719-578-3220 to schedule a time to discuss further outbreak guidance and next steps. Please note, this is not meant to be a punitive action; Public Health often has access to resources and guidance that are not available elsewhere.
- Fill out the [CDPHE COVID-19 outbreak report form](#) to report the outbreak in accordance with Colorado law.
- Begin identifying staff with COVID-19-like symptoms using this CDPHE COVID-19 [line list template](#).

Do not wait until you have five or more employees out sick to act. Contact Public Health as soon as you see a sudden increase in cases or severe outcomes to discuss prevention and mitigation procedures to attempt to avoid having further illness in the facility.

If five or more cases are detected within 14 days among employees, consider temporarily closing to ensure proper disinfection and sanitation, and report the outbreak immediately to Public Health. Public Health will help you confirm if an outbreak exists, identify additional cases, and determine the extent of the outbreak. Public Health will also help you develop a plan to safely reopen. By working closely with Public Health, you may be able to conduct a rapid risk assessment and implement immediate control measures instead of closing.

During an outbreak, Public Health will help you build a plan that may include the following components:

- [Enhanced cleaning, disinfection](#), and [environmental controls](#)
- Contact tracing to identify healthy employees who may have been exposed to an ill co-worker
- Excluding vulnerable employees at higher risk for serious illness while the outbreak is ongoing
- Requiring all employees to use face masks (cloth or otherwise) while at work
- Helping clarify the best way to clear employees to return to work
- Additional workplace/facility closures may be required by Public Health if widespread transmission continues to occur, despite the above measures or if there are not enough staff available to run safely
- Additional outbreak mitigation recommendations may be made depending on specific situations

Learn more about [Preventing, Reporting and Mitigating Workplace Outbreaks](#)