

Southern Berkshire Public Health Collaborative

Serving Alford, Great Barrington, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, Mount Washington, New Marlborough, Otis, Sheffield, and Stockbridge

Common Questions from COVID-19 Positive Individuals and their Close Contacts:

Q: How long should I stay home and isolate following a positive result?

A: Your isolation period is 10 days total. This is a state public health regulation, enforceable by your local Board of Health. Please visit <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/what-to-do-if-you-have-or-have-been-exposed-to-covid-19> for more specific instructions on how to isolate at home.

Q: How is the 10-day isolation period calculated?

A: Day 0 is the first day your symptoms began, or your positive test date, whichever came first. Starting on that date, count forward 10 days. Day 11 is the day you can return to work, school etc. If you still feel quite sick on Day 11, stay home until you feel well enough to work.

Q: Could I still be infectious after 10 days?

A: It is rare for someone to still be infectious after staying home 10 days with COVID, and this typically occurs only when someone has been in the hospital with severe symptoms.

Q: I am nearing the end of my isolation period. Should I retest before I go back to work?

A: No. The outcome of a new test 10 days after your first positive result will not indicate whether you are still infectious. It will only reflect whether you still have remnants of the virus in your system that are detectable by the lab. Per the CDC, employers should not require a negative test for staff to return unless it is a special circumstance, such as an essential healthcare worker being asked to return to work early.

Q: I tested positive for COVID. Who are my close contacts?

A: Your infectious period would have begun 48 hours before your first symptom started. If you have no symptoms, you are considered to have been infectious from 48 hours before you tested positive. Going back those 48 hours and leading up to the time you began to isolate, anyone who is not fully vaccinated or has not recovered from COVID in the past 90 days AND was indoors within 6 ft of you for a total of 15 minutes is considered a close contact.

Q: I was identified as a close contact of someone with COVID but we both wore masks the entire time. Do I still need to quarantine?

A: Yes, if you are not fully vaccinated (if your 2nd Pfizer/Moderna or your J&J shot was less than 14 days ago). While masking is very helpful in reducing transmission, state regulations still require close contacts to quarantine even if masked during their exposure.

Q: How is it schools don't assign it as close contact if the staff and kids were wearing masks?

A: Schools follow joint Dept. of Ed. and Dept. of Public Health regulations. These require a number of mitigation strategies be used, including improved HVAC systems, 3-6 ft spacing as much as possible, windows open on buses, and universal masking except at lunchtime. For that reason, masked close contacts from school or bus exposures are not required to quarantine in the same way that the general public is. This exception does not apply to other settings, including daycares, youth sports or other programs, unless specifically identified by the state.

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Common Questions from COVID-19 Positive Individuals and their Close Contacts, cont'd:

Q: How do I know if I'm fully vaccinated?

A: If it is more than 14 days after your J&J shot or your second Pfizer or Moderna shot, you are considered fully vaccinated.

Q: I'm not fully vaccinated but had COVID already. Do I still need to quarantine after being exposed?

A: Yes, if the close contact definition (indoors within 6 ft for 15 min or more) is met AND you recovered from COVID more than 90 days ago AND are not fully vaccinated. This is because the amount of natural immunity protection and length of time it lasts varies quite a bit among individuals. If you were exposed less than 90 days after recovering from COVID infection, you do not need to quarantine.

Q: What do close contacts need to do?

A: Per state regulation, close contacts must stay home in quarantine IF they are not already fully vaccinated or recovered from COVID in the past 90 days. Please visit <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/what-to-do-if-you-have-or-have-been-exposed-to-covid-19> for more information on how to quarantine at home. There are 3 possible timeframes for quarantine, ranging from 7 to 14 days. See below.

Q: How long do I need to quarantine?

A: Day 0 is the last day you were exposed to the infectious person. Count forward to Day 5 and get tested on that day or later (PCR or rapid at a testing site, a home test does not count in this case).

- 1) If result is negative and you have not developed any symptoms, you may return to work, school, etc. on Day 8.
- 2) If you do not get tested and have no symptoms, you must stay home a bit longer and can come out on Day 11.
- 3) If the result is negative and you develop any symptoms during the 14 days following exposure, you need to get a PCR test. Even if the second result is negative, you must stay home a full 14 days after exposure, coming out on Day 15 (this is to account for a possible false negative result). If the result is positive, you'll need to follow the isolation guidance, explained above.

Q: I am a close contact and must quarantine. Do I need to wear a mask at home and keep away from others in my household? Do they need to stay home also?

A: No. Household members of a person in quarantine do not need to stay home. This may change if the quarantining person becomes symptomatic or tests positive. The level of precaution everyone takes at home will depend on whether they are vaccinated and/or boosted, have underlying medical conditions, or work with high risk individuals.

Q: I live with someone who is infectious with COVID. What should we do?

A: To reduce the chance of spread, the infectious person should isolate in a separate room from others and wear a mask when they briefly come into common spaces. Normal handwashing and cleaning is sufficient, there is no need to sanitize surfaces, wear gloves or take other extraordinary measures.

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Infection from surface contact has been found to be extremely rare. Ventilating shared spaces by cracking windows and running fans, plus mask wearing, are your best lines of defense.

Common Questions from COVID-19 Positive Individuals and their Close Contacts, cont'd:

Q: I'm vaccinated but not boosted, or I had COVID already, and a household member is infections with COVID. Do I need to test and quarantine?

A: No, this is not a requirement. However, household spread is the most common cause of breakthrough and repeat infections. If you are vaccinated but not boosted, you may wish to get tested for good measure - immunity may have waned after 5-6 months. Household members who are fully vaccinated or recovered from COVID in the past 90 days are not required to quarantine but are advised to mask and social distance in public indoor spaces for the next few weeks. They should get tested if any new symptoms appear.

Q: I'm not fully vaccinated or recovered from COVID more than 90 days ago. How long do I need to quarantine?

A: You'll follow the quarantine guidance described above. The main thing will be for you to determine your last date of close contact. This will depend on the sick person's ability to truly isolate within the home. In families with small children who are infected and parents or siblings are not fully vaccinated, the last date of exposure (Day 0) is usually the last day the sick person is still infectious. Unvaccinated family members stay home through that date, and then remain at home for another 7 days, getting tested on Day 5 or later. This often means the person who infected with COVID returns to work or school a week before other quarantining household members. Given the high infectiousness of COVID, unvaccinated household members may wish to test while the sick person is still isolating at home, to determine their own COVID status as early as possible. They will still need a negative test on Day 5 to end quarantine after 7 days.

Q: I am isolating at home with COVID and now another household member has tested positive. Can we isolate together?

A: Yes. While actively sick with COVID (even if no symptoms), you cannot be reinfected. Also, as explained above, the natural immunity you develop is expected to protect you against future reinfection for at least 90 days following recovery. After that, you are encouraged to get vaccinated to reduce your risk for reinfection.

Please Note: Beginning December 8, 2021 the MA Department of Public Health has asked Local Boards of Health to prioritize their case investigations and contact tracing to focus on unvaccinated children, seniors at risk for more severe symptoms, and to support outbreaks in congregate settings. This means that most individuals will no longer receive a call from their local public health nurse after a positive test result is obtained. Anyone with specific questions about an exposure, isolation or quarantine guidance is encouraged to visit <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/what-to-do-if-you-have-or-have-been-exposed-to-covid-19>, visit their local Board of Health website, or reach out to their local public health nurse (listed on town website).