

# COVID-19 FAQ's: Employers & Businesses

## 1) What do I do if I an employee develops symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19?

**If employees develop COVID-19 symptoms, they should take the following actions:**

- Seek immediate medical attention if experiencing any difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Leave the workplace immediately and continue to stay home from work, public places and activities outside the home.
- Get tested for COVID-19 (drive-thru testing information is available at [www.snohd.org/testing](http://www.snohd.org/testing)).

**Any person who tests positive for COVID-19 or has been exposed to a positive case and is experiencing symptoms (a probable case) should:**

Isolate for at least 10 days since symptoms first appeared. If a person tests positive and has no symptoms, the 10- day isolation period begins on the date the test was administered. A person's contagious period is considered 2 days before symptoms appear (or 2 days before test date if no symptoms) through the 10-day isolation.

For step-by-step guidance on what to do next watch the video [COVID and the workplace: What to do if you receive a report of a positive case](#).

## 2) What do I do if an employee has been exposed to a someone who has COVID-19?

**Any employee who is not fully vaccinated and was a close contact of a positive case (within 6 ft. of physical space for a cumulative 15 minutes or more, regardless of mask use) should:**

- Quarantine for 10 days, or 7 days if they test negative 5-7 days after exposure, beginning on the last day of exposure to the positive case during the case's contagious period, and monitor symptoms.
- Per CDC guidelines, employers may consider allowing unvaccinated exposed critical infrastructure workers to continue to work in select instances when it is necessary to preserve the function of critical infrastructure workplaces as long as they do not develop any symptoms (even mild) or receive a positive test. **This option should be used as a last resort and only in limited circumstances, such as when cessation of operation of a facility may cause serious harm or danger to public health or safety.** When essential workers who have been exposed do continue to work during the quarantine period they are still required to quarantine when not at work. Their activities should be limited to work and home unless they need to go out to seek medical care.
- Because some people become infected with COVID-19 and do not develop symptoms, it is still recommended that they get tested even if they feel fine. Unvaccinated close contacts should test *twice*: Immediately after learning of their exposure, and again 5-7 days after their last exposure to a positive case. This will help to find cases who would otherwise be missed because they don't have symptoms. It is very important that these close contacts continue to monitor for symptoms even if they test negative, as it can take up to 14 days to develop COVID-19 after exposure.

**Any employee who has been fully vaccinated and shows no symptoms of COVID-19:**

- Does not need to quarantine
- Should get tested 5-7 days after their exposure, even they don't have symptoms
- A person is considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 when it has been more than or equal to 2 weeks after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer or Moderna), or more than or equal to 2 weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Janssen).

**Any employee who has had COVID-19 illness within the previous 3 months and has recovered and remains without COVID-19 symptoms also does not need to quarantine.**

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## 3) Can an employer require their employees be tested for COVID-19?

Yes. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the ADA requires any policy mandating employee testing be “job related and consistent with business necessity.” Therefore, employers may take steps, including testing, to determine whether employees entering the workplace have COVID-19. For more information see [What You Should Know About Covid-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws](#). The Snohomish Health District does not direct employers in their creation of testing policies outside of an investigation or reinforcing a clearly stated COVID-19 requirement.

### And if so, who should be tested?

Symptomatic staff members and those who have had close contact with a confirmed case should be tested.

- Any symptomatic employee should be tested immediately.
- Unvaccinated close contacts should test *twice*: Immediately after learning of their exposure, and again 5-7 days after their last exposure to a positive case.
- Vaccinated workers should be tested 5-7 days after their last exposure to a positive case.

Testing may be directed by Health District outbreak investigation staff for any employee or group of employees it deems appropriate. For More Information see [CDC: Who Should Get Tested](#).

### Can employees come back to work if they test negative?

Employees must complete their full isolation period **even if they get a negative test**, and full quarantine period according to their vaccination status. See question #1 regarding isolation guidance and question #2 for quarantine guidance.

- According to Washington DOH, if this is not possible, stay in quarantine for 10 days after your last contact, without additional testing. If you have any COVID-19 symptoms during the 10 days, stay in quarantine the full 14 days and get tested. **Keep watching for symptoms until day 14.**
- It may be possible to end quarantine after 7 full days beginning after your last contact **if** you have been without symptoms and after receiving a negative result from a test taken 5 to 7 days after exposure. **Keep watching for symptoms until day 14.**

For more information see the [DOH: Isolation and Quarantine for COVID-19](#).

## 4) Should an employer require their employees to be tested for COVID-19 routinely or only before returning to work?

Routine testing of asymptomatic employees is only recommended in certain high-risk situations (e.g., healthcare workers in skilled nursing facilities). Testing asymptomatic workers for COVID-19 only assesses the worker at that point in time and tests do not always detect people who are infected.

The Health District **does not recommend** a testing-based strategy for determining when an employee can return to work after testing positive for COVID-19. This is because pieces of the virus can remain in the airway for up to several weeks after recovery and can cause the test to be falsely positive. If someone is to

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get re-tested after the isolation period, they may test positive although they are no longer contagious. A time-based strategy is recommended (see #5 below).

## 5) If negative COVID-19 test results are not required to confirm that an employee is safe to return to work, then how does an employer know that it's safe for that employee to return to work?

The CDC, DOH, and Health District all recommend a time-based strategy for determining when an employee can return to work in most circumstances.

### **People with confirmed COVID-19 infection who are not hospitalized can return to work after:**

- At least 10 days since symptoms first appeared and
- At least 24 hours with no fever without fever-reducing medication and
- Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving (Note: Loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation).

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People with confirmed COVID-19 infection who were admitted to a hospital may need to stay in isolation up to 20 days since their symptoms first appeared. Those who tested positive, but are asymptomatic, must remain in isolation through the 10<sup>th</sup> day after they were tested.

**Unvaccinated workers who have had close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case should remain in quarantine through the 10<sup>th</sup> day after their last exposure or the 7<sup>th</sup> day with a negative test 5-7 days after exposure.** There is no need to quarantine for vaccinated workers with no symptoms or those who have had COVID-19 in the previous 3 months and have recovered and remain without symptoms. They should, however, continue to monitor for symptoms and isolate immediately and get tested if any symptoms develop.

Employers may consider allowing exposed critical infrastructure workers to continue to work in select instances when it is necessary to preserve the function of critical infrastructure workplaces as long as they do not develop any symptoms (even mild) or receive a positive test. **This option should be used as a last resort and only in limited circumstances, such as when cessation of operation of a facility may cause serious harm or danger to public health or safety.** When essential workers who have been exposed do continue to work during the quarantine period they are still required to quarantine when not at work. Their activities should be limited to work and home unless they need to go out to seek medical care.

The Health District encourages employers to allow employees to return to work upon fulfilling these time-based requirements. For more information see [CDC Ending Home Isolation for Persons with COVID-19 Not in Health Care Settings](#).

## 6) Should an employer require some sort of doctor's note or public health correspondence confirming that an employee is allowed to return to work?

That is up to the employer, but the CDC does not recommend that employer's require sick employees to provide a COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider's note to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work.

It is important that employers communicate with employees to ensure that they remain away from work for the full duration of their isolation or quarantine period. Those testing positive for COVID-19, and those who have been in close contact with a confirmed case should be advised that to return to work prior to release from isolation or quarantine, respectively, violates the Governor's and the local health officer's orders, and therefore is a misdemeanor.

The Health District will not provide employees written documentation to certify that they are safe to return to work but will provide guidance on time-based return to work strategies.

Individuals tested at Health District sites can request a copy of documentation of their results if needed.

The Health District is a public health agency rather than a health care provider and cannot fill out FMLA certifications. This must be completed by the employee's personal health care provider.

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## 7) If the employer is aware of one or more positive COVID-19 cases, are they required to disclose the cases to a public health investigator?

Yes. Revealing such cases whenever and wherever they exist or have existed (i.e., both present and past) is part of cooperating with a communicable disease investigation and is obligated pursuant to [WAC 246-101-425](#).

Please see our video [COVID and the Workplace: What Employers Should Do if They Receive Notice of a Positive Case](#) for additional guidance.

## 8) Is it okay for me to share private employee information with Health District Investigators?

Yes. Governor Inslee's Proclamation (20-25.6) requires employers to cooperate with public health authorities in the investigation of cases, suspected cases, outbreaks, and suspected outbreaks of COVID-19, which includes sharing lists of employees with their contact information and other relevant documents, if - requested. For more information see [Requirement for Disclosure of Information and Confidentiality of Employee Health Information for Public Health Investigation](#).

Protecting confidentiality of public health investigation and employee health records all case reports and medical information obtained by the health department are confidential [\[WAC 246-101320 Handling of case reports and medical information.\]](#)

Information disclosed to an employer by public health must be treated as confidential employee health information. [CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) §1630.14 Medical examinations and inquiries specifically permitted.]

An employer may not disclose to anyone else the name of the person or condition being investigated and must maintain the confidentiality of information received about the person in the course of assisting in the public health investigation.

For More information see [What You Should Know About COVID-19 and the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act, and Other EEO Laws](#).

## 9) Are employers required to collect and later disclose client/customer personal information to public health investigators?

Yes, the Health District recommends that all places of business maintain a visitor/client log that is retained for 30 days in the event that a contact investigation is needed. Businesses are required to share with us any and all identifying and locating information that they have for subjects of a communicable disease investigation, including employees, volunteers, and patrons, pursuant to [WAC 246-101-425](#).

## 10) For customer/client-oriented employers that learn of an employee testing positive for COVID-19, is the employer required to inform customers/clients about potential exposure?

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to develop a plan for notifying them. In that context, the employer must cooperate in providing all known identifying and locating information as discussed above.

## 11) Will the Health District require a business or organization to close because of a confirmed case?

In most cases, having confirmed cases will not result in closure. A business may voluntarily close for cleaning or may need to close because they do not have enough staff to operate if multiple employees are to remain at home during quarantine. However, if a business is not cooperating with the Health District during an active case investigation, a Health Officer Order may be issued. Such orders may require the temporary closure of the business, as well as potential legal action if the business fails to comply with the order.

## 12) Do I need to pay the employee while they are in quarantine or isolation?

In certain circumstances, employers are required to provide paid leave to employees who have been affected by COVID-19. Employers should review [state](#) and [federal](#) requirements to ensure that they are compliant with the reliefs and protections that are available to employees during this pandemic. The Health District encourages employers to support their employees whenever possible, and to point them to state and federal resources for more options. Please see <https://esd.wa.gov/about-employees> and [www.doh.wa.gov/Coronavirus/Workplace](http://www.doh.wa.gov/Coronavirus/Workplace) for more information about resources, guidelines and laws for both employees and employers.