**CDC** Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

# Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

# Criteria for Return to Work for Healthcare Personnel with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 (Interim Guidance)

> CDC guidance for COVID-19 may be adapted by state and local health departments to respond to rapidly changing local circumstances.

**Who this is for**: Occupational health programs and public health officials making decisions about return to work for healthcare personnel (HCP) with confirmed COVID-19, or who have suspected COVID-19 (e.g., developed symptoms of a respiratory infection [e.g., cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, fever] but did not get tested for COVID-19).

Decisions about return to work for HCP with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 should be made in the context of local circumstances. Options include a test-based strategy or a non-test-based strategy (i.e., time-since-illness-onset and time-since-recovery strategy).

## Return to Work Criteria for HCP with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19

**Use one of the below strategies to determine when HCP may return to work in healthcare settings**

1. *Test-based strategy.* Exclude from work until
   - Resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications **and**
   - Improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), **and**
   - Negative results of an FDA Emergency Use Authorized molecular assay for COVID-19 from at least two consecutive nasopharyngeal swab specimens collected ≥24 hours apart (total of two negative specimens)[1]. See Interim Guidelines for Collecting, Handling, and Testing Clinical Specimens for 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

2. *Non-test-based strategy*. Exclude from work until
   - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed *since recovery* defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications **and** improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); **and**,
   - At least 7 days have passed *since symptoms first appeared*

If HCP were never tested for COVID-19 but have an alternate diagnosis (e.g., tested positive for influenza), criteria for return to work should be based on that diagnosis.

## Return to Work Practices and Work Restrictions

After returning to work, HCP should:

- Wear a facemask at all times while in the healthcare facility until all symptoms are completely resolved or until 14 days after illness onset, whichever is longer
- Be restricted from contact with severely immunocompromised patients (e.g., transplant, hematology-oncology) until 14 days after illness onset
- Adhere to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette in CDC's interim infection control guidance (e.g., cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, dispose of tissues in waste receptacles)
- Self-monitor for symptoms, and seek re-evaluation from occupational health if respiratory symptoms recur or worsen

## Crisis Strategies to Mitigate Staffing Shortages

Healthcare systems, healthcare facilities, and the appropriate state, local, territorial, and/or tribal health authorities might determine that the recommended approaches cannot be followed due to the need to mitigate HCP staffing shortages. In such scenarios:

- HCP should be evaluated by occupational health to determine appropriateness of earlier return to work than recommended above
- If HCP return to work **earlier than recommended above**, they should still adhere to the Return to Work Practices and Work Restrictions recommendations above. For more information, see CDC's Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with COVID-19.

## Footnotes

[1]All test results should be final before isolation is ended. Testing guidance is based upon limited information and is subject to change as more information becomes available. In persons with a persistent productive cough, SARS-CoV-2-RNA might be detected for longer periods in sputum specimens than in upper respiratory tract (nasopharyngeal swab) specimens.

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