

COVID-19 Return to Work Guide for AHS Healthcare Workers

Safety is the most important thing during the COVID-19 pandemic and there are a lot of different feelings around symptoms, self-isolation, and testing. This guide will help you understand when it is appropriate to return to work after you have experienced symptoms, been tested for COVID-19, or been self-isolating. Expedited returns to work will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and must be discussed with your leader and approved by Zone Emergency Operations Centres.

1) I've been told to self-isolate for 14 days—can I go back to work sooner if I test negative for COVID-19?

- If you've recently travelled or been exposed to COVID-19 (e.g., close contact* to a patient with COVID-19 without appropriate [personal protective equipment](#)), then you'll need to self-isolate for a full 14 days.
- Not everyone requires testing. People who don't have the main COVID-19 symptoms will not be tested. As a healthcare worker, you will be tested for COVID-19 if you have fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, a runny nose, or nasal congestion.
- If you develop a fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, a runny nose, or nasal congestion during your 14-day self-isolation and you have not been tested for COVID-19, then you have to continue to self-isolate for 14 days from the start of your self-isolation period **OR** for 10 days from the time your symptoms started **OR** until your symptoms are gone—**whichever is longer**. Healthcare workers can't work when they aren't well.
- For example: This individual would not return until day 18, to allow for 10 days to pass since symptoms began even though the symptoms have gone away.

Day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	Day 1: Start of Self-isolation							Day 8: Symptoms start							Day 15: Symptoms are gone		Day 18: Return to Work	

- If you develop those symptoms and are tested and it comes back negative, then you can go back to work after your 14-day self-isolation **OR** after your symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.
- If you develop any other symptoms such as muscle aches, red eyes (conjunctivitis), nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea (but none of the seven symptoms listed above) during your 14-day self-isolation, then you must continue to self-isolate for the 14 days **OR** until your symptoms are gone **whichever is longer**.
- If you don't have any symptoms during your 14-day self-isolation, then you can go back to work when the full 14 days of self-isolation are complete.

2) I don't believe I've been exposed to COVID-19 and I didn't travel outside Canada in the past 2 weeks, but I was referred for COVID-19 testing because I have a respiratory illness (e.g., cough, sore throat). My test came back negative—when can I go back to work?

- You may have been exposed to COVID-19 if you've:
 - travelled outside of Canada in the past 2 weeks;
 - had close contact* with a COVID-19 patient;
 - had close contact* with someone with an acute respiratory illness who either travelled outside of Canada in the 14 days before they became sick or had close contact* with a COVID-19 patient.
 - had laboratory exposure to biological material (e.g. primary clinical specimens, virus culture isolates) known to contain COVID-19 virus.

- Even if you didn't travel or do not believe you were exposed, if you have COVID-19 symptoms and you're a healthcare worker, you still need to self-isolate and be tested for COVID-19. You'll be tested if you have any of fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, a runny nose, or nasal congestion.
- If your test comes back negative, then you'll still have to self-isolate until your symptoms are gone. Healthcare workers can't work when they aren't well.
- If you have certain symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, runny nose, or nasal congestion), but **you were never tested for COVID-19**, then you must remain off work and self-isolate at home for 10 days from the time your symptoms started, or until your symptoms are gone, **whichever is longer**. Healthcare workers can't work when they aren't well.
- If you have symptoms, but none of the symptoms that require testing for COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, runny nose, or nasal congestion), then you must remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms resolve. Healthcare workers can't work when they aren't well.

3) I wasn't exposed to COVID-19 and I haven't travelled outside Canada within the past 2 weeks, but I'm not feeling well. When I called Workplace Health and Safety/Health Link, I was told I didn't need to be tested for COVID-19 for the symptoms I was having. When can I go back to work?

- People only need to be tested for COVID-19 if they have any of fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, a runny nose, or nasal congestion. If you get any of these symptoms, self-isolate immediately and call 811.
- If you have other symptoms, such as muscle aches, conjunctivitis ("red eye"), nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea, then you don't need to be tested. However, you still need to remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms are gone. Healthcare workers can't work when they aren't well.

4) My partner is self-isolating and doesn't have any symptoms. I don't have any symptoms either. Do I need to self-isolate?

- If the person you live with doesn't have any symptoms and you don't either, then you don't need to self-isolate. You can go to work like normal *unless* you've travelled outside Canada within the past 2 weeks or you've had another possible COVID-19 exposure – such as close contact* with someone who has COVID-19 without wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

5) My partner is self-isolating and has symptoms. We're just waiting for test results. I don't have any symptoms—do I need to self-isolate?

- If your partner got symptoms within 14 days of a possible exposure to COVID-19 (such as being in close contact* of someone diagnosed with COVID-19), then you need to self-isolate too, because your partner would be considered a probable case. You should self-isolate for 14 days, starting from the last time you had close contact* with your partner.
- If your partner got symptoms within 14 days of returning from travel outside Canada, then you need to self-isolate for 14 days starting from the last time you had close contact* with your partner.
- If your partner hasn't travelled outside Canada in the last 2 weeks and has not had any known exposure to the COVID-19 virus, then you don't need to self-isolate and you can work like normal unless you develop symptoms. If you develop symptoms, then you should self-isolate and complete [Healthcare Worker Self-Assessment tool](#) to determine next steps.

6) I've had a nagging cough since January. My manager told me that I should stay home until the cough is gone, but I feel fine otherwise. Is it safe for me to go to work?

- COVID-19 usually causes new symptoms or makes chronic symptoms much worse. If you have a chronic symptom like a cough, that hasn't really changed much for weeks (or months), and you've seen a doctor

and you don't currently have an infection that you could pass onto someone else, then it's okay for you to work.

- It's okay for people with a chronic cough or reactive airway disease to go back to work after they've been sick if they're still coughing, as long as it's not worse and they don't have any other symptoms.

7) I had some symptoms last week, so I decided to self-isolate. I haven't travelled and don't believe I've been exposed to anyone with COVID-19. My symptoms are better now and I was never tested for COVID-19. Do I need to stay off work for the full 14 days of self-isolation?

- A 14-day self-isolation period is required if you have been potentially exposed to the COVID-19 virus (such as recent travel or close contact* to a patient with COVID-19 without appropriate personal protective equipment). See question #1 regarding 14-day self-isolation requirements, as well as the [Healthcare Worker Self-Assessment tool](#).
- Any healthcare worker who has any COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath, nasal congestion, difficulty breathing) should be tested for COVID-19.
- If you've had these symptoms but haven't travelled or had any known exposure to COVID-19, and you haven't been tested, then you should self-isolate for 10 days after your symptoms started OR until your symptoms are gone—**whichever is longer**. Healthcare workers can't work when they aren't well.
- If you have other symptoms, such as muscle aches, conjunctivitis ("red eye"), nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea, but none of the symptoms listed in the second bullet, above, and you haven't travelled or had any known exposure to COVID-19, then you should remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms are gone. Healthcare workers can't work when they aren't well.

8) I tested positive for COVID-19. When can I go back to work?

- You will need to self-isolate until you are cleared by either Public Health or WHS to return to work.
- You'll need to be retested to find out when you can go back to work. The first test you have after your initial positive result will be at least 10 days after your symptoms started (or the date you were diagnosed if you didn't have symptoms), or once your symptoms are gone—whichever is later.
- If the first test you have after your initial positive result is negative, then you'll have another test at least 24 hours later. If this test is also negative, then you can go back to work—you need 2 negative tests in a row to go back to work.
- If the first test after your initial positive result is still positive, then you'll need to be retested every 3 days until you have a negative result. After that, you'll have another test at least 24 hours later. If that test is also negative, then you can go back to work—you need 2 negative tests in a row to go back to work.

***Close Contact** is defined as a person who:

- provided care for the patient, including healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers, or who had other similar close physical contact without consistent and appropriate use of [personal protective equipment](#)
OR
- who lived with/otherwise had close prolonged contact (within 2 metres) with the person while they were infectious
OR
- had direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of the person (e.g. was coughed or sneezed on) while not wearing recommended [personal protective equipment](#).