



JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

1400 6th Avenue South | Birmingham, AL 35233 (205) 933-9110 | www.jcdh.org

Serving Jefferson County Since 1917

Frequently Asked Questions from Businesses

1. **If an employee has symptoms concerning for COVID-19, what type of tests should they pursue to diagnose COVID-19?**
 - To diagnose COVID-19, a PCR-based (polymerase chain reaction) test **OR** a rapid antigen test should be utilized.
 - COVID-19 antibody tests should **not** be used for the purposes of diagnosing COVID-19. This is a blood test.
2. **What should be done if an employee tests positive for COVID-19?**
 - In the event that an employee tests positive for COVID-19, a designated company representative should begin to obtain the following information:
 - When did the employee start having symptoms concerning for COVID-19? (Cough, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches, change in sense of smell, change in sense of taste, headache, etc.)
 - [Symptoms of Coronavirus](#)
 - When was the employee last present at work?
 - Does the employee have symptoms or do they have no symptoms?
 - If the employee was having symptoms, the company representative will need to start determining contacts in the workplace beginning **two days** prior to symptom onset.
 - For example, if an employee had a cough and fever on 12/03/2020, then contacts in the work place would need to be determined from 12/01/2020 until their last day on the job.
 - If the employee was not having symptoms, two days prior to the date of the positive test.
 - What defines a close contact?
 - A close contact is defined as a person who has been within **6 feet for 15 minutes** or greater (over the course of a 24-hour period) of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
 - It is critically important that an employee's privacy is maintained. Their name should NOT be disclosed to other employees as this is protected health information as regulated under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA).
 - If you have not yet been contacted by the Jefferson County Department of Health, you can call 205-930-1440 to seek out specific guidance for your organization.
3. **If an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, do they need a negative test prior to returning to work?**
 - No. As long as employee has met the requirements for ending quarantine (see below), they can safely return to work without getting a negative test.
 - i. If an employee is having symptoms and is diagnosed with COVID-19, they need to isolate at home for 10 days from the first day of symptoms, and they need to have no fever for 24 hours prior to returning.
 - ii. If an employee is not having symptoms and is diagnosed with COVID-19, they need to isolate at home for 10 days from the date of their test and remain without symptoms.
4. **If an employee knows of someone who has been a contact to another person with COVID-19, do they need to be excluded from work?**
 - No, the employee would not need to be excluded from work in this situation unless they have been directly in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

5. **Who should be excluded from work?**
- **Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should be excluded from the workplace** as defined by the quarantine order issued from Jefferson County Department of Health or as defined by the Alabama Department of Public Health if the employee does not reside in Jefferson County.
 - **Persons who have tested positive and have no symptoms should also be excluded from the workplace.** Even in the absence of symptoms, COVID-19 can be passed from person to person.
6. **Can the 14-day period of quarantine for persons who have been exposed to COVID-19 be shorter than 10 days?**
- The ideal length of quarantine time continues to be 14 days.
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently endorsed a shorter option for quarantine someone has been in contact with another person who has tested positive for COVID-19.
 - The new recommendation allows for a 10-day period of quarantine after exposure **if the following criteria are met:**
 - i. The close contact must continue to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 through day 14 after the last date of exposure.
 - ii. If **any one** of the following symptoms are observed, **isolate immediately** and seek testing: fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or running nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.
 - iii. Wear a mask, stay 6 feet from others, avoid crowds, wash hands frequently, and take other steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in case the close contact is infectious without symptoms for the full 14-day period and beyond.
 - **Due to the extraordinarily high level of spread of COVID-19 in the community, the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Jefferson County Department of Health DO NOT endorse the 7-day strategy for coming out of quarantine.**
7. **What if an employee lives in the same household as someone who has tested positive for COVID-19?**
- In the event that a member of an employee's household tests positive for COVID-19, the employee should be excluded from the workplace for at least 10 day days from the end of the isolation period of the person in the household who originally tested positive for COVID-19. If a person has tested positive for COVID-19 and they live in the same household as the employee, there is a very high chance that COVID-19 could have been transmitted to that employee.
 - Before returning to work, an employee who has a household contact who has tested positive for COVID-19 should be assessed for symptoms.
 - They should have no fever for at least one day without fever reducing agents, and they should be assessed for symptoms such as cough, fever, muscle aches, or changes in smell/taste.
8. **When is the best time for an employee to be tested after an exposure?**
- Because of the biology of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, a person will not immediately test positive after exposure. It may take between 4 to 6 days after exposure before a person will test positive for COVID-19.
 - We do not recommend immediately testing after exposure. However, quarantine is needed for a person who has had a significant exposure.
 - If an employee is tested immediately after exposure, **the negative test does not indicate that they do not have COVID-19.** Therefore, it is still important that they quarantine at home for the full for at least 10 days and up to 14 days from their last exposure to COVID-19.
9. **If an employee has had a significant exposure AND they had a test 4-6 days after that exposure, will they be able to come back to work if they had a negative test result for COVID-19?**
- No. Even with a negative test result a person who has had a significant exposure to COVID-19 will need to be excluded from work for at least 10 days and up to 14 days.

- While the CDC has outlined a 7-day quarantine period, the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Jefferson County Department of Health do not endorse the 7-day strategy given very high levels of community spread of COVID-19.

10. If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, when can they come back to work?

- After completion of 10 days of isolation and assuring that the employee does not have fever, it is safe for the employee to return to work.
- For individuals who are asymptomatic, they will need to be excluded from work for 10 days from the date of their diagnostic test.
- Returning to work before these conditions are met will significantly increase the risk of spread of COVID-19, and this may further impact business operations.

11. One of my employees recently tested positive for COVID-19, what should I do to clean their area and workspace?

- For more detailed information, please refer to the following website: [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\), May 2020](#).
- Wait 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting to minimize potential for other employees being exposed to respiratory droplets. If waiting 24 hours is not feasible, wait as long as possible.
- Comprehensive guidance for cleaning and disinfection procedures can be found at: [Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#).
 - i. If seven days or more have passed since the last exposure to a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, an area will only need standard cleaning.
- A comprehensive list of approved disinfectants against COVID-19 can be found at: [List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19\)](#)