COVID-19 Return to Work Guide for Healthcare Workers

Safety is of the utmost importance for Alberta Health Services (AHS). As an AHS healthcare worker (HCW), you may experience many different emotions around symptoms, work restrictions, 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 in close contact with a person with COVID-19.

For help determining when you can return to work, see the Return to Work Decision Chart.

1) I’ve recently tested positive for COVID-19, when should I notify Workplace Health and Safety (WHS)?

- WHS continues to contact trace for workplace exposures. If you have tested positive AND you were at work during the following times there is potential for exposure to staff and patients you may have interacted with. Please contact your Zone WHS department if you work for AHS or APL, or contact OHS (1-855-342-8070) if you work for Covenant Health and the following applies to you after testing positive.
  - You worked while you were symptomatic OR
  - You worked in the 48 hours prior to your symptom onset with breaks in hand hygiene, continuous masking, or errors in donning and doffing OR
  - You worked after your work restriction period while still infectious (ex: days 6 to 10) with breaks in hand hygiene, continuous masking, or errors in donning and doffing

- If you believe you acquired your COVID-19 infection from the workplace, contact your Zone WHS department if you work for AHS or APL, or contact OHS (1-855-342-8070) if you work for Covenant Health to report your positive result.

2) I’ve recently returned to Canada from international travel – do I need to follow federal guidelines for quarantine or isolation?

- The management of international travelers arriving in Canada falls under federal jurisdiction. It is the individual responsibility of all international travelers arriving in Canada to ensure that they are aware of, understand, and comply with all federal requirements regarding COVID-19. All federal border testing, quarantine, and isolation requirements ended on Oct 1, 2022.

3) If I’ve been in close contact with a person with COVID-19, what happens next?

- If you have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19, you should closely self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 7 days after your close contact and continue to follow fit for work screening requirements. If you remain asymptomatic you can continue to work with no restrictions.

- If you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell) or any other COVID-19 symptoms during your symptom monitoring period that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you should be tested for COVID-19. Molecular testing is preferable, and you should take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 molecular testing.
Rapid Antigen Testing

- If you are tested using a Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test, and the test result is negative, then a second test is recommended. Molecular testing is preferred. If you do not undergo either a second Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test or a molecular test, then follow the instructions in the section under “COVID-19 Testing Not Completed”, below.

- If you are tested using a Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test, and the test result is positive, then you must be work restricted for 5 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

Molecular Testing

- If you are tested using a molecular test and the test result is negative, then you can go back to after your symptoms resolve.

- If you are tested using a molecular test and the test result is positive, then you must be work restricted for 5 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

COVID-19 Testing Not Completed

- If you are NOT tested for COVID-19 by molecular test or do not a complete a second rapid antigen test, then:
  - If your symptoms included any of fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell, then you must continue to be work restricted for 5 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.
  - If your symptoms DID NOT include any of fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell, then you must continue to be work restricted until symptoms resolve.

4) If I’ve been in close contact with a person with COVID-19, do I need to be off work if I’ve previously tested positive for COVID-19?

- If you were a confirmed case of COVID-19, and you have new symptoms that started within 21 days after the date that your COVID-19 symptoms started, or within 21 days after the date that your specimen was collected for COVID-19 testing if you never developed symptoms, then you should seek medical attention as necessary and not come to work until you feel well enough to do so. Also note that you should not undergo rapid antigen testing or molecular testing for 21 days after the date that your COVID-19 symptoms started, or 21 days after the date of your first positive test if you never developed symptoms.

- However, if your date of last exposure occurred 22 days or more after your COVID-19 symptoms started, or 22 days or more after the date of your first positive test if you never developed symptoms, then you must follow the instructions provided in Question #3.

5) I have NOT been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 in the past seven days. I have developed symptoms consistent with COVID-19 – what happens next?

- If you were recently a confirmed case of COVID-19, and you have new symptoms that started within 21 days after the date that your COVID-19 symptoms started, or within 21 days after the date that your specimen was collected for COVID-19 testing if you never developed symptoms, then you should not come
to work until you feel well enough to do so. Also note that you should not undergo rapid antigen testing or molecular testing\(^4\) for 21 days after the date that your COVID-19 symptoms started, or 21 days after the date of your first positive test if you never developed symptoms. If you have not recently been a confirmed case of COVID-19, or it has been more than 21 days since the onset of your COVID-19 infection, then you must follow the instructions provided in the bullet points below.

- If you have not been in close contact\(^1\) with a person with COVID-19, and you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell) or any other COVID-19 symptoms that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you must not come to work pending the results of COVID-19 testing. Molecular testing is preferable, and you should take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 molecular testing.

**Rapid Antigen Testing**

- If you are tested using a Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test, and the test result is negative, then a second test is recommended. Molecular testing is preferred. If you do not undergo either a second Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test or a molecular test, then follow the instructions in the section under “COVID-19 Testing Not Completed”, below

- If you are tested using a Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test, and the test result is positive, then you must be restricted for 5 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

**Molecular Testing**

- If you are tested using a molecular test and the test result is negative, then you can go back to after your symptoms resolve.

- If you are tested using a molecular test and the test result is positive, then you must be work restricted for 5 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

**COVID-19 Testing Not Completed**

- If you are NOT tested for COVID-19 by molecular test or do not a complete a second rapid antigen test, then:
  - If your symptoms included any of fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell, then you must continue to be work restricted for 5 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

- If your symptoms DID NOT include any of fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell, then you must continue to be work restricted until symptoms resolve.

6) I have NOT been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 in the past seven days. However, I have developed some new symptoms. When I used the online COVID-19 self-assessment, it indicated that I don’t need to be tested for COVID-19. When can I go back to work?

- If you develop new onset symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, but none of these symptoms warranted testing for COVID-19, then you must remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms resolve.
Note that if you were recently a confirmed case of COVID-19, then you should not undergo rapid antigen testing or molecular testing\(^4\) for 21 days after the date that your COVID-19 symptoms started.

If you develop new or additional symptoms since the last time you took the COVID-19 self-assessment, then you should stay home and take the COVID-19 self-assessment again.

7) There is someone in my household who has no symptoms but thinks that they may have had close contact with a COVID-19 case. I don’t have any symptoms either. Can I come to work?

- If the person you live with doesn’t have any symptoms (and did not recently test positive for COVID-19) and you don’t either, then you can go to work as per usual unless you’ve had close contact\(^1\) with someone who has COVID-19 (see Question #3 if this applies to you).

8) Someone in my household is isolating and has symptoms. We’re just waiting for test results. I don’t have any symptoms – what should I do?

- You will first need to determine if the person you live with is a probable case of COVID-19. A probable case is a person with clinical illness (any one or more of the following: fever, new or worsening: cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, sore throat, loss of sense of taste or smell, or runny nose) who in the last 7 days:
  - Had close contact\(^1\) with a confirmed case of COVID-19, OR was exposed to a known outbreak of COVID-19, OR had a laboratory exposure to biological material known to contain COVID-19, AND
  - Who does not have a lab-confirmed COVID-19 test or the result was inconclusive.

- If the person you live with is a probable case of COVID-19, then you will be considered to have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19. See Question #3 for corresponding next steps. If you have recently been a confirmed case of COVID-19, see Question #4 for corresponding next steps.

- If the person you live with is not a probable case of COVID-19, then you can continue to work as per usual. However, if this symptomatic person in your household tests positive for COVID-19, then you will be considered to have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19. See Question #3 for corresponding next steps. If you have recently been a confirmed case of COVID-19, see Question #4 for corresponding next steps.

9) I tested positive for COVID-19 and completed my work restriction. I feel that I’ve completely recovered, other than a lingering cough. Is it safe for me to go to work?

- COVID-19 usually causes new symptoms or makes chronic symptoms much worse. If you have had symptoms due to confirmed COVID-19, then you must be work restricted\(^3\) for a minimum of 5 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications, whichever is longer.

- If symptoms such as a lingering cough, loss of sense of taste/smell or fatigue persist beyond your 5 day work restriction period, then you may return to work as long as you have been without a fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, other symptoms have improved, and you feel well enough to go back to work.

- Confirmed COVID-19 cases are the most infectious for up to 5 days after the onset of symptoms. However, a case is considered infectious for up to 10 days therefore extra vigilance and strict adherence to continuous masking, hand hygiene and physical distancing with others should be followed when returning to work after day 5 of infection.
10) I just received notice that a classmate of my child has tested positive. As a result, I have to keep my child home from school. Am I allowed to go to work?

• In this situation, your child would be considered a close contact\(^1\) of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
  
  o If your child is asymptomatic and you are asymptomatic, then you can continue to work as usual.
  
  o If your child has developed any fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered sense of taste/smell, that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you will be considered to have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19. The next steps will depend on whether or not you were recently a confirmed case of COVID-19. See Question \#4 for corresponding next steps. COVID-19 testing of your child is encouraged.
  
  ▪ Note that if your symptomatic child is tested for COVID-19 and the result is negative, then you can continue to work as usual so long as you remain asymptomatic. If you develop symptoms, then see Question \#5 for further instructions.

11) I recently received the COVID-19 vaccine and then I developed symptoms – what should I do?

• If you have recently been immunized, you may experience side effects from the vaccine. It is common to experience redness, swelling, bruising, or feeling sore where you had the needle – such symptoms are typically mild, go away in a few days, and don’t require you to stay off work.

• Sometimes, people may experience symptoms that go beyond the injection site, and such symptoms are similar to symptoms of COVID-19, including: fever or chills, feeling tired or unwell, headache, body aches or sore joints, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or swollen lymph nodes.

• If you have side effects that are the same as COVID-19 symptoms, then you must be work restricted, even if you think the side effects are from the vaccine.
  
  o If your side effects include fever and/or shortness of breath but no other COVID-19 symptoms, and your fever and/or shortness of breath start within 24 hours of receiving the vaccine and go away within 48 hours after starting, then you do not have to keep isolating and you can go back to your normal activities (unless you were told to be work restricted for other reasons).
  
  o If your fever and/or shortness of breath start after 24 hours of receiving the vaccine or last longer than 48 hours, or if you experience any other COVID-19 symptoms, then stay home and take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing. If you are not tested, then you must be work restricted\(^3\) for 5 days from the start of your symptoms, or until your symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.
12) I am immunocompromised and have been a close contact or have tested positive for COVID-19. Are my work restrictions different?

- If you are a close contact and immunocompromised, your next steps will depend on whether you are symptomatic.
- If you have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19, you should closely monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 7 days after your close contact and continue to follow fit for work screening requirements. If you remain asymptomatic you can continue to work with no restrictions.
- If you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell) or any other COVID-19 symptoms during your symptom monitoring period that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you should be tested for COVID-19. Molecular testing is preferable, and you should take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 molecular testing.

Rapid Antigen Testing

- If you are tested using a Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test, and the test result is negative, then a second test is recommended. Molecular testing is preferred. If you do not undergo either a second Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test or a molecular test, then follow the instructions in the section under “COVID-19 Testing Not Completed”, below
- If you are tested using a Health Canada-approved COVID-19 rapid antigen test, and the test result is positive, then you must be restricted for 14 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

Molecular Testing

- If you are tested using a molecular test and the test result is negative, then you can go back to after your symptoms resolve.
- If you are tested using a molecular test and the test result is positive, then you must be work restricted for 14 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

COVID-19 Testing Not Completed

- If you are NOT tested for COVID-19 by molecular test or do not a complete a second rapid antigen test, then:
  - If your symptoms included any of fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell, then you must continue to be workrestricted for 14 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.
  - If your symptoms DID NOT include any of fever or chills, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, cough, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, nausea or diarrhea, or loss or altered of sense of taste/smell, then you must continue to be work restricted until symptoms resolve.
1. **Close Contact** is defined as a person who:
   - Provided direct care for the case (including healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers), or who had other similar close physical contact (e.g., intimate partner, hug, kiss, handshake) without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment; OR
   - Lived with or otherwise had close prolonged contact which may be cumulative, i.e., multiple interactions for a total of 10 minutes or more over a 24-hour period and within two metres with a case without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment and the case is not completely isolating away from others in the home; OR
   - Had direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of a case (e.g., shared cigarettes, glasses/bottles, eating utensils) or was coughed or sneezed on while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment.
   - An individual who had unprotected contact with a case within two meters for one minute or longer where the case engaged in activities generating increased aerosols such as speaking, singing, shouting or breathing heavily (e.g., exercise).

2. **Date of last exposure.** Your date of last exposure will depend on any ongoing interaction with the case. The instructions below apply for all COVID-19 cases (variant of concern (VOC) or non-VOC):
   - If the positive case is from your workplace and you will have no additional close contact with the case, then your self-monitoring period is 7 days from the day you last interacted with the case.
   - If the positive case is from your household and you will have ongoing close contact with the case in your household, then your self-monitoring period is 7 days from the last day of exposure. In this situation, your “date of last exposure” (i.e. “day 0”) is the date when the case’s infectious period ends.

   - **“Infectious period”** is defined as:
     - For a COVID-positive case who is symptomatic, 48 hours prior to the onset of symptoms until 10 days after symptom onset, or until symptoms improve and the case is fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications), whichever is longer.
     - For a COVID-positive case who remains asymptomatic, 48 hours prior to their COVID test (swab collection) until 10 days after their COVID test date. Note that if symptoms subsequently develop after the test date, then the infectious period would last until 10 days after symptom onset, or until symptoms improve and the case is fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications), whichever is longer.

3. **Work restricted** means you must not attend work or any other function at an AHS setting (except for the purpose of receiving health services). An AHS setting means any environment where treatment/procedures and other health services are delivered by, on behalf of, or in conjunction with, AHS. This includes but is not necessarily restricted to all land, facilities, affiliated sites, mobile equipment and vehicles owned, leased, or rented, and AHS corporate offices for the purposes of conducting AHS business; it does not include working remotely from home.

4. **Molecular test** means a nucleic acid amplification test to detect RNA of SARS-CoV-2 (e.g., PCR test or rapid molecular test such as ID NOW).