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 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 work restricted***. 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.

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

1) I’ve recently returned to Canada from international travel – do I need to quarantine?

- The management of international travellers arriving in Canada falls under federal jurisdiction. It is the individual responsibility of all international travellers arriving in Canada to ensure that they are aware of, understand, and comply with all federal requirements regarding COVID-19.

- Travellers who have been fully immunized against COVID-19 (see Question #2 for immunization definitions) may be exempted from having to quarantine after their arrival in Canada if they meet all federal requirements for consideration of an exemption. When you arrived in Canada, if you were instructed by a federal government representative that you met all federal requirements for exemption from quarantine, then you do not have to quarantine and you can continue to work with no restrictions so long as you remain asymptomatic:
  - You should closely monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after your arrival in Canada, and continue to follow fit for work screening requirements.
  - If you develop any COVID-19 symptoms that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you should isolate immediately and take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing.

- If you are fully immunized but have not met all federal requirements for exemption from quarantine, OR if you are partially immunized or unimmunized (see Question #2 for immunization definitions), OR if you have otherwise been instructed by a federal government representative that you must quarantine, then you will be legally required by the federal Quarantine Act to quarantine for 14 days after your arrival in Canada. This requirement applies regardless if the returning traveller has previously tested positive for COVID-19. The remaining bullet points for question #1 only refer to those returning travellers who are required to quarantine.

- If you don’t have any symptoms during your 14-day quarantine, then you can go back to work when the full 14 days of quarantine are complete. You are required to quarantine for the full 14 days, even if you are tested for COVID-19 during your quarantine and the result is negative.

- If you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) during your 14-day quarantine period that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you must take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing.
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 14-day quarantine OR after your symptoms resolve – whichever is longer.
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see Question #12.
  - If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue to quarantine for 14 days, or isolate for 14 days (federal requirement) after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND

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you are afebrile for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

- For example: a healthcare worker starts quarantine on June 1. On June 6, this healthcare worker develops fever, cough, and sore throat, and the fever resolved and other symptoms improved by June 12. In this scenario, the healthcare worker who does not undergo COVID-19 testing would need to self-isolate for 14 days from symptom onset (the symptom onset date of June 6 would be “day 0”); the isolation would end at the completion of June 20, and the healthcare worker could return to work on June 21.

- If you develop any other COVID-19 symptoms (but NOT any of fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) during your 14-day quarantine period that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then it is recommended that you take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing.
  
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 14-day quarantine OR after your symptoms resolve – whichever is longer.
  
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 the test result is positive, then see Question #12.
  
  - If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue to quarantine for 14 days, or until symptoms resolve – whichever is longer.

2) If I’ve been in close contact with a person with COVID-19, do I need to be off work if I’ve been immunized?

- If you have been in close contact* with a person with COVID-19, then your requirement to be work restricted will depend on your COVID-19 immunization status at the time that close contact occurred, as defined below:
  
  - Unimmunized: You have not received any doses of vaccine, or it has been 14 days or less since you received your first dose in a two-dose vaccine series (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Covishield), or one dose of vaccine in a one-dose vaccine series (e.g., Janssen). See Question #4 for work restriction considerations if you have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19.
  
  - Partially immunized: It has been more than 14 days since you received the first dose of a two-dose vaccine series (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Covishield). See Question #5 for work restriction considerations if you have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19.
  
  - Fully immunized: It has been more than 14 days since you received your second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Covishield), or more than 14 days since you received one dose of vaccine in a one-dose vaccine series (e.g., Janssen). See Question #6 for work restriction considerations if you have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19.
3) 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 have previously tested positive for COVID-19 and then subsequently have been in close contact* with a person with COVID-19, then your requirement to be work restricted*** will depend on when you previously tested positive for COVID-19:
  - If your close contact with a person with COVID-19 occurred more than 90 days since your previous positive test result, then you will be required to be work restricted if you are unimmunized or partially immunized. See Question #2 for immunization definitions. See Question #4 if you are unimmunized, or see Question #5 if you are partially immunized.
  - If your close contact with a person with COVID-19 occurred less than or equal to 90 days since your previous positive test result, then no work restriction is required (regardless of your COVID-19 immunization status) and you can continue to work with no restrictions so long as you remain asymptomatic.
    - You should closely monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after your close contact, and continue to follow fit for work screening requirements.
    - If you develop any COVID-19 symptoms that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you should isolate immediately and take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing.
4) I’m **UNIMMUNIZED** and I’ve been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 – what happens next?

- You are considered to be **Unimmunized** if you have not received any doses of vaccine, or it has been 14 days or less since you received your first dose in a two-dose vaccine series (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Covishield), or one dose of vaccine in a one dose vaccine series (e.g., Janssen).

- If you are unimmunized and you have been in **close contact** with a person with COVID-19, then you must be **work restricted** for 14 days, starting from the **date of last exposure**. Please note that you are **NOT** required to be work restricted if your close contact with a person with COVID-19 occurred less than or equal to 90 days since you previously tested positive for COVID-19 – see **Question #3** if this applies to you.

- If you don’t have any symptoms during your 14-day work restriction, then you can go back to work when the full 14 days of work restriction are complete.

- If you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) during your 14-day work restriction that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you must take the online **COVID-19 self-assessment** for consideration of COVID-19 testing:
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 14-day work restriction OR after your symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see **Question #12**.
  - If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue to be work restricted for 14 days, or work restricted for 10 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you are afebrile for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medications – **whichever is longer**.

- For example: a healthcare worker starts their work restriction on June 1. On June 6, this healthcare worker develops fever, cough, and sore throat, and the fever resolved and other symptoms improved by June 12. In this scenario, the healthcare worker who does not undergo COVID-19 testing would need to be work restricted for 10 days from symptom onset (the symptom onset date of June 6 would be “day 0”); the work restriction would end at the completion of June 16, and the healthcare worker could return to work on June 17.

- If you develop any other **COVID-19 symptoms** (but NOT any of fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) during your 14-day work restriction that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then it is recommended that you take the online **COVID-19 self-assessment** for consideration of COVID-19 testing:
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 14-day work restriction OR after your symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see **Question #12**.
  - If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue to be work restricted for 14 days, or until symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.
5) I’m PARTIALLY IMMUNIZED and I’ve been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 – what happens next?

- You are considered to be Partially immunized if it has been more than 14 days since you received the first dose of a two-dose vaccine series (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Covishield).

- If you are partially immunized and you have been in close contact* with a person with COVID-19, then you must be work restricted*** for 10 days, starting from the date of last exposure**. Please note that you are NOT required to be work restricted if your close contact with a person with COVID-19 occurred less than or equal to 90 days since you previously tested positive for COVID-19 – see Question #3 if this applies to you.

- If you are partially immunized, then you should closely monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after your potential exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. See Question #7 if you develop symptoms after your work restriction ends.

- If you don’t have any symptoms during your 10-day work restriction, then you can go back to work when the full 10 days of work restriction are complete.

- If you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) during your 10-day work restriction that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you must take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing:
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 10-day work restriction OR after your symptoms resolve – whichever is longer.
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see Question #12.
  - If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue to be work restricted for 10 days, or until symptoms resolve – whichever is longer.

  For example: a healthcare worker starts their work restriction on June 1. On June 6, this healthcare worker develops fever, cough, and sore throat, and the fever resolved and other symptoms improved by June 12. In this scenario, the healthcare worker who does not undergo COVID-19 testing would need to be work restricted for 10 days from symptom onset (the symptom onset date of June 6 would be “day 0”); the work restriction would end at the completion of June 16, and the healthcare worker could return to work on June 17.

- If you develop any other COVID-19 symptoms (but NOT any of fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) during your 10-day work restriction that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then it is recommended that you take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing:
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 10-day work restriction OR after your symptoms resolve – whichever is longer.
  - If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see Question #12.
  - If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue to be work restricted for 10 days, or until symptoms resolve – whichever is longer.
6) I’m FULLY IMMUNIZED and I’ve been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 – what happens next?

- You are considered to be Fully immunized if it has been more than 14 days since you received your second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series (e.g., Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Covishield), or more than 14 days since you received one dose of vaccine in a one-dose vaccine series (e.g., Janssen).

- If you are fully immunized, then you are not required to be work restricted*** after being in close contact* with a person with COVID-19. You can continue to work with no restrictions so long as you remain asymptomatic.
  
  o You should closely monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after your close contact, and continue to follow fit for work screening requirements.

  o If you develop any COVID-19 symptoms that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you should isolate immediately and take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing.

7) I have NOT travelled outside of Canada and I have NOT been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 in the past two weeks. I have developed symptoms – what happens next?

- If you didn’t travel outside of Canada and you have not been in close contact* with a person with COVID-19, and you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) 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 and take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing:

  o If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your symptoms resolve.

  o If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see Question #12.

  o If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must be work restricted for 10 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you are afebrile for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medications – whichever is longer.

- If you didn’t travel outside of Canada and you have not been in close contact* with a person with COVID-19, and you develop any other COVID-19 symptoms (but NOT any of fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of taste or smell) that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then you should stay home and limit contact with others. It is recommended that you take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing:

  o If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your symptoms resolve.

  o If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see Question #12.

  o If you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you can go back to work after your symptoms resolve.
8) I have NOT recently travelled outside of Canada and I have NOT been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 in the past two weeks. 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.
- 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.

9) 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 like normal unless you’ve travelled outside Canada within the past two weeks and been instructed to quarantine (see Question #1 if this applies to you) or you’ve had close contact* with someone who has COVID-19 (see Question #2 if this applies to you).

10) Someone in my household is isolating and has symptoms. We’re just waiting for test results. I don’t have any symptoms – do I need to isolate?

- If the person you live with developed any one or more of the following symptoms (fever, new onset/exacerbation of cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of taste or smell) within 14 days of returning to Canada from international travel or being in close contact* with someone with laboratory confirmed COVID-19, then you will be required to be work restricted*** if you are unimmunized or partially immunized. See Question #2 for immunization definitions. See Question #4 if you are unimmunized, or see Question #5 if you are partially immunized. Note that you will not be required to be work restricted, regardless of immunization status, if you tested positive to COVID-19 within 90 days of your contact with the symptomatic person in your household – see Question #3 for more details.
- If the person you live with hasn’t travelled outside Canada in the last two weeks or been in close contact* with someone with laboratory confirmed COVID-19, then you are not required to be work restricted and can continue to work as per usual. However, if this symptomatic person in your household is tested for COVID-19 and the result is positive, then you will be required to be work restricted if you are unimmunized or partially immunized. See Question #2 for immunization definitions. See Question #4 if you are unimmunized, or see Question #5 if you are partially immunized. Note that you will not be required to be work restricted, regardless of immunization status, if you tested positive to COVID-19 within 90 days of your contact with the symptomatic person in your household – see Question #3 for more details.
11) I tested positive for COVID-19 and completed my 10-day 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 COVID-19, then you must be work restricted for 10 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you are afebrile for 24 hours, 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 10 days, then you may return to work as long as other symptoms have improved and you are well enough to go back to work.

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

- If you have tested positive for COVID-19, then you must be work restricted for 10 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms have improved AND you are afebrile for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medications, whichever is longer. If you tested positive while you were asymptomatic and you never developed symptoms, then you must be work restricted for 10 days after the date that your specimen was collected for COVID-19 testing. If you tested positive for COVID-19 while quarantining after returning to Canada from international travel, then you are subject to the federal Quarantine Act and you must isolate for 14 days, starting from the date of your positive test.

- You can return to work after your work restriction or isolation period, as described in the preceding bullet, is complete.

- A negative COVID-19 test result and/or a medical note is not required to return to work, school, or other activities once your work restriction or isolation period is complete.

13) I am asymptomatic, and I was tested for COVID-19 and the result was negative – what happens next?

- If you are required to quarantine after returning to Canada from international travel, then you must quarantine for the full 14 days, even if you are tested for COVID-19 during your quarantine and the result is negative. See Question #1 for more details.

- If you have been in close contact* with a person with COVID-19, then you will be required to be work restricted*** if you are unimmunized or partially immunized. See Question #4 if you are unimmunized, or Question #5 if you are partially immunized, for more details regarding COVID-19 testing and follow-up actions in these scenarios. See Question #2 for immunization definitions. Note that you will not be required to be work restricted, regardless of immunization status, if your close contact with a person with COVID-19 occurred less than or equal to 90 days since you previously tested positive for COVID-19 – see Question #3 if this applies to you.

- If you have NOT been instructed to quarantine after returning to Canada from international travel and you have NOT been in close contact* with a person with COVID-19, then you can continue to work as per usual if you are asymptomatic, both while awaiting your COVID-19 test result, and also after receiving a negative test result.

14) 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 of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
  - If your child is asymptomatic and you are asymptomatic, then you can continue to work as usual.

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If your child has developed any of fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or loss of sense of smell or taste, that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you will be required to be work restricted*** if you are un-immunized or partially immunized. See Question #2 for immunization definitions. See Question #4 if you are un-immunized, or see Question #5 if you are partially immunized. Note that you will not be required to be work restricted, regardless of immunization status, if you tested positive to COVID-19 within 90 days of your contact with your symptomatic child – see Question #3 for more details. 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 are not required to be work restricted and can continue to work as usual so long as you remain asymptomatic, regardless of your COVID-19 immunization status. If you develop symptoms, then see Question #7 for further instructions.

If your child has developed any other symptoms (that are not listed in the preceding bullet) that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from their usual symptoms, then COVID-19 testing of your child is encouraged. If you are asymptomatic, then you can continue to work as usual while awaiting your child’s test result, or if your child is not tested. If you develop symptoms, then see Question #7 for further instructions.

If your child tests positive for COVID-19 and you are a close contact with your child, then you will be required to be work restricted if you are un-immunized or partially immunized. See Question #2 for immunization definitions. See Question #4 if you are un-immunized, or see Question #5 if you are partially immunized. Note that you will not be required to be work restricted, regardless of immunization status, if you tested positive to COVID-19 within 90 days of your contact with your symptomatic child – see Question #3 for more details.

15) 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’s not unusual 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, swollen lymph nodes.

- If you have side effects that are the same as COVID-19 symptoms, then you must stay home and away from others (isolate), even if you think the side effects are from the vaccine.

  o If your side effects start within 24 hours of receiving the vaccine and go away within 48 hours after the side effects start, 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 side effects start after 24 hours of receiving the vaccine or last longer than 48 hours, 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*** for 10 days from the start of your symptoms, or until your symptoms have improved and you have gone 24 hours without a fever, without taking fever-reducing medications (e.g., Advil or Tylenol), whichever is longer.

- Please see the COVID-19 Client Immunization Record and Care After Immunization for more information.
**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 15 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.

**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 you are able to live separately from the positive case during your work restriction (e.g., you were exposed at work to the case and will have no interaction with the case outside of work; or the case is from your household, but either you or the case will be temporarily living at a different location), then your work restriction starts after your last contact with the case.
- If the positive case is from your household, and the case is able to completely isolate at home (i.e., separate bedroom and washroom, avoidance of all close contact with other individuals in the home, no shared meals, etc.), then your work restriction starts after your last contact with the case (i.e., the date the case starts isolating).
- If the positive case is from your household and you will have ongoing close contact with the case in your household, then you must be work restricted for the duration of the case’s infectious period) PLUS an additional 14 days (if you are unimmunized) or 10 days (if you are partially immunized) from the date of last exposure. In this situation, your “date of last exposure” 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

**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.