

COVID-19 Return to Work Guide for 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.

For help determining when you can return to work, see the [Return to Work Decision Chart](#).

1) I've been told to self-isolate for 14 days because of recent travel or a potential COVID-19 exposure – what happens next?

- If you've recently travelled or been exposed to COVID-19 (e.g., close contact* to a person with COVID-19 without appropriate [personal protective equipment](#)), then you are legally required (under public health order) to self-isolate for a full 14 days. This is called quarantine.
- When someone is infected with a contagious disease, there is some time between being exposed and becoming sick. People who get COVID-19 disease usually start developing symptoms 2 to 14 days after exposure. By isolating during this time, it protects others from being exposed to a potentially infectious person.
- If you develop new symptoms or a worsening of symptoms that are related to a pre-existing illness or health condition during your 14-day self-isolation, then you must take the online [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) for consideration of COVID-19 testing.
- If you are tested for COVID-19 during your 14-day self-isolation and the test result is positive, then see question #8.
- If you are tested for COVID-19 during your 14-day self-isolation and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 14-day self-isolation AND after your symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.
- If you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or a runny nose) during your 14-day isolation period and you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue the 14 day self-isolation due to the exposure, or self-isolate for 10 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms are gone – **whichever is longer**. Additionally, healthcare workers cannot work in a healthcare setting for 14 days since symptom onset or until symptoms are gone – **whichever is longer**.
- For example: This individual would have to self-isolate for 10 days after symptom onset (day 15) from all public places, but could not return to work until day 19, to allow for 14 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 | 19 | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|----------|----|----|----|----|----------------|----|----|----|----|-----------|--|
| Day 1: | | | | | Day 5: | | | | | Day 11: | | | | | Day 15: | | | | | Day 19: | |
| Self-isolation | | | | | Symptoms | | | | | Symptoms | | | | | Self-isolation | | | | | Return to | |
| starts | | | | | starts | | | | | are gone | | | | | ends | | | | | work | |

- If you develop any other new onset symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition during your 14-day self-isolation, and you are NOT tested for COVID-19, 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 have NOT recently travelled outside of Canada and I have NOT been potentially exposed to COVID-19. I have developed symptoms – what happens next?

- If you didn't travel and do not believe you were exposed, and you have developed new onset (or worsening of chronic symptoms) cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you must take the online [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) for consideration of COVID-19 testing. All Albertans with these symptoms are legally required (under public health order) to self-isolate for 10 days; **however, If you have no known exposure to the virus and you have tested negative for COVID-19, then you are NOT legally required to isolate.** If you have no travel or exposure history and you have developed a cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose but you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must self-isolate for 10 days after onset of symptoms or until symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer.**
- If you didn't travel and do not believe you were exposed, and you have developed any other symptoms (that are not listed in the preceding bullet) that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you should take the online [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) for consideration of COVID-19 testing. If you don't have cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose, then you are NOT legally required to self-isolate while awaiting testing; however, you should stay home and minimize contact with others.
- If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see question #8, below.
- If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, and you did not have travel or have a known exposure in the past 2 weeks, then you can go back to work after your symptoms resolve, even if you had developed a cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose (the negative test eliminates the legal requirement to self-isolate for 10 days). Note that a cough may persist for several weeks after recovering from a viral respiratory illness, but this does not mean that the individual with the post-viral cough is infectious. Someone who has recovered from a viral respiratory illness but still has a cough (and no other symptoms) does not need to continue to self-isolate; however, if their chronic cough worsens, then they should take the [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) for consideration of COVID-19 testing.
- If you have no travel or exposure history, develop new onset symptoms, but are NOT tested for COVID-19, then:
 - If your symptoms include any of cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose, then you must self-isolate for 10 days after onset of symptoms or until symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer.**
 - If your symptoms do NOT include any of cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose, then you must remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms resolve.

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 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.

4) My partner is 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 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 developed symptoms within 14 days of being in close contact* with someone with laboratory confirmed 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 developed 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 must self-isolate and take the online [COVID-19 self-assessment](#).

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 person with COVID-19 without appropriate personal protective equipment). See question #1 regarding 14-day self-isolation requirements, as well as the online [COVID-19 self-assessment](#).
- Any healthcare worker who has developed a cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition must take the online [COVID-19 self-assessment](#).
- 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**.

- If you have any other new onset symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you should take the online [COVID-19 self-assessment](#) for consideration of COVID-19 testing. If you are NOT tested, or if you are tested and the result is negative, then you must remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms resolve. If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see question #8.

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

- Like all Albertans, if you have tested positive for COVID-19, then you are legally required to self-isolate for at least 10 days from when your symptoms started or until your symptoms are gone, whichever is longer.
- At the end of the self-isolation period, you are free to leave your home and tend to any personal responsibilities (e.g. grocery shopping, etc). However, healthcare workers may not work in any healthcare setting until 14 days have passed since symptoms started AND symptoms have resolved, whichever is longer.

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

- If you've recently returned from travel outside of Canada or been exposed to COVID-19 (through close contact* to a person with COVID-19 without appropriate [personal protective equipment](#)), then you are legally required to self-isolate for the full 14 days. If you don't have any symptoms and are tested for COVID-19 during your 14-day self-isolation and the result is negative, then you can go back to work when the required 14 days of self-isolation are complete.
- If you have NOT recently travelled outside of Canada and have NOT been exposed to 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.

***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](#).