

# What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19

## Summary of April 27, 2021 changes

- Updated mask requirements to align with CDC language.

## Introduction

If you have been exposed to COVID-19, or think you have been exposed, you can help prevent the spread of the virus to others in your home and community. Please follow the guidance below.

## Symptoms of COVID-19

Common [symptoms](#) are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, fatigue, congestion, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or new loss of taste or smell.

## How do I know if I've been exposed to COVID-19?

The virus that causes COVID-19 most commonly spreads between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet, or 2 arm lengths). An infected person can [spread the virus](#) through respiratory droplets or small particles, such as those in [aerosols](#). People most often get exposed by a household member or through close contact with another person. Close contact means that you have been within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period of time. Some people get COVID-19 without knowing how they were exposed.

## Participate in a public health interview

If someone with COVID-19 tells public health they have recently been in close contact with you, you may hear from us by text or phone call. An interviewer will help you understand what to do and what support is available. The interviewer will not tell you who gave them your name. If you later become ill, they will ask you for the names and contact information of people you were recently in close contact with to notify them about exposure. They will not share your name when they reach out to them.

## I had close contact with someone who tested positive COVID-19 but I am not sick. What should I do?

You should quarantine at home and away from others (*self-quarantine*). Current quarantine recommendations are to stay in quarantine for 14 days after your last contact. **This is the safest**

**option.** Monitor your symptoms during this time, and if you have any [COVID-19 symptoms](#) during the 14 days, get tested. Certain high-risk settings or groups **should** use the 14-day quarantine option:

- People who work or stay in an acute or long-term healthcare setting.
- People who work or stay in a correctional facility.
- People who work or stay in a shelter or transitional housing.
- People who live in communal housing such as dormitories, fraternities or sororities.
- People who work in crowded work situations where physical distancing is impossible due to the nature of the work such as in a warehouse or factory.
- People who work on fishing or seafood processing vessels.

If this is not possible, stay in quarantine for 10 days after your last contact, without additional testing. If you have any COVID-19 symptoms during the 10 days, stay in quarantine the full 14 days and get tested. **Keep watching for symptoms until day 14.**

Under special circumstances it may be possible to end quarantine after 7 full days beginning after your last contact *if* you have been without symptoms *and* after receiving a negative result from a test (get tested no sooner than 48 hours before ending quarantine.) *This will depend on availability of testing resources.* **Keep watching for symptoms until day 14.**

Consult your local health jurisdiction to find the best option for your individual circumstances.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently announced new guidance that fully vaccinated persons with an exposure to someone with COVID-19 are **not** required to quarantine if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Are fully vaccinated (see [When You've Been Fully Vaccinated](#) section below for more information.)
- Have not had symptoms since current COVID-19 exposure.

Fully vaccinated persons should still watch for symptoms for 14 days after their exposure. They should also continue to wear masks, practice social distancing, and keep their social circles small.

An exception to the guidance is that vaccinated inpatients and residents in healthcare settings should continue to quarantine following an exposure to someone with COVID-19.

Persons who do not meet both criteria should continue to follow [current quarantine guidance](#) after exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

## I had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and now I'm sick. What should I do?

If you were exposed to COVID-19 and get [symptoms](#), you should stay home and away from other people including household members and animals in your home (*self-isolate*), even if you have very mild symptoms. Contact your health care provider for a test. Tell them you were exposed to someone with COVID-19 and are now sick.

**If somebody does not have a doctor or health care provider:** many locations have free or low-cost testing, regardless of immigration status. See the [Department of Health's Testing FAQ](#) or call the [WA State COVID-19 Information Hotline](#).

## How long do I need to isolate myself?

1. If you have confirmed or suspected COVID-19 and **have symptoms**, you can end home isolation when:
  - It's been at least 24 hours with no fever without using fever-reducing medication **AND**
  - Your [symptoms](#) have improved, **AND**
  - At least 10 days since symptoms first appeared.
2. If you test positive for COVID-19, but **have not had any symptoms**, you can end home isolation when:
  - At least 10 days have passed since the date of your first positive COVID-19 test, **AND**
  - You have had no subsequent illness.

More guidance is available for [people who have or are suspected to have COVID-19](#).

## Monitor your symptoms

Get medical help right away if your symptoms get worse. Before you get care, call your health care provider and tell them that you have COVID-19 symptoms. Put on a face covering before you enter the healthcare facility to protect others in the waiting room and exam rooms.

If you have a medical emergency and need to call 911, tell the dispatch staff that you have COVID-19 symptoms. If possible, put on a face covering before emergency services arrive.

## What should I do to keep my illness from spreading to my family and other people in the community?

- **Stay home, except to get medical care.**
  - Do not go to work, school, or public areas. Avoid using public transportation, taxis, or ride sharing. Ask others to do your shopping or use a grocery delivery service.
  - Call before you go to a healthcare provider and tell them you have COVID-19 or are being evaluated for COVID-19. Put on a face covering before you enter the building. These steps will help keep people in the office or waiting room from getting sick.
- **Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home.**
  - As much as possible, stay in a specific room and away from other people.
  - Use a separate bathroom, if available.
  - Wear a cloth face covering when you are around others. If you cannot wear a face covering, other people should wear a face covering when they enter your room.

A cloth face covering is anything that completely covers your mouth and nose, and fits securely on the sides of your face and under your chin. It should be made of two or more layers of tightly woven fabric with ties or straps that go around your head or

behind your ears. A face shield with a drape can be used by people with developmental, behavioral, or medical conditions that prevent them from wearing a cloth face covering. Face shields may also be used by children in childcare, day camp, and K-12 settings. In the workplace, masks or respirators may be required as they are more protective than cloth face coverings.

- Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends strategies](#) to improve mask fitting to more effectively slow the spread of COVID-19. These strategies include wearing a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask, knotting the ear loops of a medical procedure mask, using a mask fitter, or using a nylon covering over a mask. In addition, DOH does not recommend the use of masks with exhalation valves or vents, or single layer bandanas and gaiters. (Respirators with exhalation valves are okay when used in accordance with guidance published by DOH and [L&I](#).)
- It is important to wear a mask in all public settings combined with continued implementation of effective public health measures such as vaccination, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and isolation and quarantine. Restrict contact with pets and other animals while sick. When possible, have another member of your household care for your animals. If you must care for your pet, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a face covering, if possible. See [COVID-19 and Animals](#) for more information.
- Don't share personal items with people or pets, including dishes, drinking glasses, cups, utensils, towels, or bedding.
- **Maintain 6 feet of physical distance** from others at all times, even if using a mask.
- **Clean your hands often.** Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol. Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes with tissues.** Throw away the used tissues and then wash your hands.
- **Clean "high-touch" surfaces frequently,** including counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, tablets, and bedside tables. Use a household cleaning spray or wipe and follow the directions on the label.

## What's the difference between isolation and quarantine?

- **Isolation** is what you do if you have COVID-19 symptoms, are awaiting test results, or have tested positive for COVID-19. Isolation means you stay home and away from others (including household members) for the recommended [period of time](#) to avoid spreading illness.
- **Quarantine** is what you do if you have been exposed to COVID-19. Quarantine means you stay home and away from others for the recommended [period of time](#) in case you are infected and are contagious. Quarantine becomes isolation if you later test positive for COVID-19 or develop COVID-19 symptoms.

## When You've Been Fully Vaccinated

### People are considered fully vaccinated:

- 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, like the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or
- 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, like Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine

Note: if it has been less than 2 weeks since your shot, or if you still need to get your second dose, you are NOT fully protected. Keep taking all [prevention steps](#) until you are fully vaccinated.

### If you've been fully vaccinated:

- You can participate in outdoor activities and recreation without a mask, [except in certain crowded settings and venues](#).
- You can gather indoors with fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask.
- You can gather indoors with unvaccinated people from one other household (for example, visiting with relatives who all live together) without masks, unless any of those people or anyone they live with has an [increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#).
- If you've been around someone who has COVID-19, you do not need to stay away from others or get tested unless you have symptoms.
  - However, if you live in a group setting (like a correctional or detention facility or group home) and are around someone who has COVID-19, you should still stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even if you don't have symptoms.

### Regardless of your vaccination status:

You should still take steps to [protect yourself and others](#) while in public settings. This includes wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet apart from others, and avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces. In addition, you should still avoid medium or large-sized gatherings and continue to watch for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), especially if you've been around someone who is sick.

Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

## More COVID-19 Information and Resources

Stay up-to-date on the [current COVID-19 situation in Washington](#), [Governor Inslee's proclamations](#), [symptoms](#), [how it spreads](#), and [how and when people should get tested](#). See our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

A person's race/ethnicity or nationality does not, itself, put them at greater risk of COVID-19. However, data are revealing that communities of color are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19- this is due to the effects of racism, and in particular, structural racism, that leaves some groups with fewer opportunities to protect themselves and their communities. [Stigma will not help to fight the illness](#). Share accurate information with others to keep rumors and misinformation from spreading.

- [WA State Department of Health 2019 Novel Coronavirus Outbreak \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [WA State Coronavirus Response \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Find Your Local Health Department or District](#)

- [CDC Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Stigma Reduction Resources](#)

**Have more questions?** Call our COVID-19 Information hotline: **1-800-525-0127**

Monday – 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., Tuesday – Sunday and [observed state holidays](#), 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. For interpretative services, **press #** when they answer and **say your language**. For questions about your own health, COVID-19 testing, or testing results, please contact a health care provider.

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 ([Washington Relay](#)) or email [civil.rights@doh.wa.gov](mailto:civil.rights@doh.wa.gov).