

Updated Quarantine Recommendations for Persons Exposed to COVID-19

DATE:	12/4/2020
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Rachel Levine, MD, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Updated Quarantine Recommendations for Persons Exposed to COVID-19
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	n/a
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Alert,” conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

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- DOH is providing options to shorten quarantine for contacts of persons with SARS-CoV-2 infection. The most protective recommended quarantine period remains at 14 days post exposure.
Quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring.
- When testing resources are sufficient, quarantine can end after day 7 if a diagnostic specimen (e.g., RT-PCR, antigen) tests negative and is collected on day 5 or thereafter and the person remains asymptomatic.
- Quarantine may not be further shortened beyond the end of day 7.
- Testing of symptomatic persons seeking evaluation for infection must be prioritized over testing for early discontinuation of quarantine.
- These updated recommendations are for the community at large and **do not apply to healthcare settings.**
- If you have questions about this guidance, please call your local health department or **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258).**

On December 2, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated their [recommendations](#) for quarantine of people exposed to SARS-CoV-2 to include options to reduce the quarantine period. The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) provides this guidance based on available information about COVID-19 and is subject to change.

This guidance is provided for the community and does **NOT** apply to healthcare or congregate settings. Patients and residents in healthcare settings exposed to COVID-19 should be treated as per healthcare

guidance outlined in [PA-HAN-526](#) or its successor. Staff working in a healthcare setting who are exposed to COVID-19 should follow guidance outlined in [PA-HAN-510](#) or its successor.

Quarantine is used to separate someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. This individual may or may not develop illness. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they have the virus. DOH recognizes that any quarantine shorter than 14 days balances reduced burden to the individual under quarantine against a small possibility of increasing the spread of the virus.

The recommendation for a 14-day quarantine was based on estimates of the upper bounds of the COVID-19 incubation period. Quarantine's importance was highlighted after it became evident that persons are able to transmit SARS-CoV-2 before symptoms develop, and that a substantial portion of infected persons never develop symptomatic illness but can still transmit the virus. In this context, quarantine is a critical measure to control transmission.

While a shortened quarantine period may increase the public's willingness to adhere to public health recommendations, the overall reduction in transmission and increased compliance will require evaluation; not only in terms of compliance with quarantine and contact tracing activities, but also for any potential negative impacts such as post-quarantine transmission. The most protective recommended quarantine period remains at 14 days post exposure.

Quarantine begins after the date of last exposure (Day 0) to a person with SARS-CoV-2 who is infectious. For persons with COVID-19 who cannot isolate from their household members, the household members' quarantine period begins when the case is no longer infectious. Refer to [PA-HAN 518](#) for additional information about infectious periods.

After reviewing the recommendations and research from the CDC, DOH recommends the following alternative options to a 14-day quarantine:

- Quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing and if **no symptoms** have been reported during daily monitoring. However, it is recommended that symptom monitoring continue until day 14.
- If diagnostic testing resources are sufficient and available, quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen tests negative and if no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring.
 - The specimen must be collected and tested within 48 hours **before** the time of planned quarantine discontinuation (e.g., in anticipation of testing delays), but quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.

In order to discontinue quarantine after Day 7, specimens must be collected on or after Day 5. Specimens collected prior to this date will **not** be sufficient to allow quarantine to end early. Either RT-PCR or antigen tests would be acceptable testing methods for discontinuation of quarantine.

Persons can discontinue quarantine at these time points only if the following criteria are also met:

- No clinical evidence of COVID-19 has been elicited by daily symptom monitoring during the entirety of quarantine up to the time at which quarantine is discontinued; and,
- Daily symptom monitoring continues through quarantine Day 14; and,
- Persons are counseled regarding the need to adhere strictly through Day 14 after exposure to all recommended non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., masking, physical distancing).
 - If any symptoms develop, they should immediately self-isolate and contact the DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH, their local health department or their healthcare provider to report this change in clinical status.

Testing for the purpose of earlier discontinuation of quarantine should be considered only if it will have no impact on community diagnostic testing. **Testing of symptomatic persons seeking evaluation for infection must be prioritized.**

This guidance is provided for the community and does **NOT** apply to healthcare or certain congregate settings. DOH recommends that non-healthcare congregate settings, such as prisons and shelters, continue to follow recommendations for a 14-day quarantine period. COVID-19 transmission within these settings can be difficult to control, and the increased transmission risk associated with shortening the quarantine time periods may be problematic in these settings. Other congregate settings, such as college dormitories, can consider implementing the shortened quarantine period but factors such as mask compliance and density of living conditions, along with the increased risk of transmission, should be carefully considered before implementing a reduced quarantine period. Daycare centers and K-12 schools can opt to shorten quarantine periods as described above as long as continued symptom monitoring for the full 14 days and other non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., masking, physical distancing) are strictly adhered to.

Persons exposed to COVID-19 who can continue to quarantine for the full 14 days may consider this, as this is the most protective quarantine. The above guidance regarding reduced quarantine periods (i.e., day 10 after exposure or day 7 after exposure with a test after day 5) provide an option for individuals where a 14 day quarantine may cause an undue burden. All recommendations should be considered, with the reminder that the 14-day option maximally reduces risk of post-quarantine transmission and remains the strategy with the greatest collective experience showing reduced disease transmission at the present time.

If you have questions about this guidance, please call your local health department or **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

Individuals interested in receiving further PA-HANs are encouraged to register at <https://han.pa.gov/>.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

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This information is current as of December 3, 2020 but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.