

Criteria for Return to Work for Employees after an absence related to COVID-19

Updated Guidance as of 1/5/2022

The following information is provided to assist you as managers and supervisors when an employee has indicated their intent to return to work following an absence related to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently updated its guidance for individuals with COVID-19. The CDC has shortened the recommended time for isolation from 10 days for people with COVID-19 to five (5) days, if asymptomatic, followed by five (5) days of wearing a face covering when around others. This change is motivated by science demonstrating that the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days, after, according to the CDC. Therefore, people who test positive for COVID-19 should isolate for five (5) days and, if asymptomatic at that time, they may leave isolation if they can continue to wear a face covering for five (5) days to minimize the risk of infecting others.

The CDC also recently updated its recommended quarantine guidance for those exposed to COVID-19. For individuals who are unvaccinated or are more than six (6) months out from their second mRNA dose (or more than 2 months after the J&J vaccine) and not yet boosted, CDC now recommends quarantine for five (5) days followed by strict face covering use for an additional five (5) days. Alternatively, if a 5-day quarantine is not feasible, it is imperative that an exposed person wear a well-fitting face covering at all times when around others for 10 days after exposure. Individuals who have received their booster shot do not need to quarantine following an exposure but should wear a face covering for 10 days after the exposure. For all those exposed, best practice would also include a test for SARS-CoV-2 at day 5 after exposure. If symptoms occur, individuals should immediately quarantine until a negative test confirms symptoms are not attributable to COVID-19.

Employee Absence due to Close Contact Tracing or Potential Exposure

The employee can return to work after five (5) days have passed since last close contact with a positive person, provided the employee has not developed COVID-19 symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19. Upon return to work, the employee will be required to wear a face covering for five (5) days whenever working near any other employees. The determination of return to work can be made by a local supervisor or manager without requiring nurse intervention as long as the employee indicates that they have not developed any symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19. If the employee indicates that they have tested positive or have developed symptoms, nurse intervention is required.

Employee Absence due to Symptoms of COVID-19 (without testing)

- The employee can return to work after these three things have happened:
 - Employee has had no fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of any fever-reducing medication);
 - AND**
 - At least five (5) days have passed since COVID-19 symptoms ceased.

* Loss of taste and/or smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the return to work.

Employee Absence due to a Positive Diagnosis:

Employees **with a positive COVID-19 test result who have had symptoms of COVID-19** can stop home isolation and return to work following an interview with a Postal Service physician or nurse to confirm:

- Employee has had no fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of any fever-reducing medication).
- AND**
- At least five (5) days have passed since COVID-19 symptoms ceased.

* Loss of taste and/or smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the return to work.

Contact your District HR Manager or District OHNA if you have any questions.