



# County of Santa Cruz



## HEALTH SERVICES AGENCY

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## PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT

**To: Santa Cruz County Healthcare Providers**

**From: Lisa B. Hernandez, MD, MPH, County Health Officer**

**Subject: Updated COVID-19 Isolation and Testing Guidance from CDPH**

**Date: January 17, 2024**

### **Situational Update:**

On January 9, 2024, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) updated their guidance recommending an updated symptom-based approach to COVID-19 isolation and testing. These new guidelines prioritize interventions for those most at risk of severe illness, while minimizing the disruptive impact of isolation in schools and workplaces. Previously, individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 were recommended to isolate at home for at least 5 days, regardless of symptoms. Under the new guidelines, CDPH now recommends that individuals may return to school or work after a positive test when they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours and their symptoms are either absent or mild and improving. Masking is still recommended for 10 days after symptom onset or positive test if asymptomatic.

These changes are made to provide updated guidance during a winter season when multiple respiratory viruses are circulating in our community, including COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). A significant proportion of these COVID-19 infections are asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic, and many people are not tested so they are unsure which respiratory illness is causing their symptoms. The current impacts of COVID-19 are also reduced compared to prior years, reflecting widespread immunity from vaccination and natural infection, as well as the availability of new treatment options. Previous guidelines were developed during a time when the population had little immunity, leading to high hospitalization and death rates that strained healthcare systems. These new guidelines aim to transition the previous COVID-specific recommendations into a broader, more sustainable approach to address multiple respiratory viruses. Notably, the State of Oregon implemented similar guidelines more than six months ago, with no disproportionate increase in COVID-19 hospitalizations or deaths observed after the change.

## ACTIONS REQUESTED OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

### **Updated Isolation Guidance for COVID-19:**

Providers should recommend the following practices to individuals who test positive for COVID-19:

- **IF Symptoms Present:**
  - Stay home until you have not had a fever for 24 hours (without using fever-reducing medication) AND other symptoms are mild and improving.
  - Speak with a healthcare provider about possible treatment as soon as you test positive, particularly if you are at high risk\* for severe COVID-19.
  - Mask when you are around other people indoors for 10 days.<sup>†</sup> You may remove your mask sooner than 10 days if you have two sequential negative tests at least one day apart.
  - Avoid contact with people at high risk\* for severe COVID-19 for 10 days.<sup>†</sup>
  
- **IF Asymptomatic:**
  - You may return to work or school, but should take the following precautions:
    - Mask when you are around other people indoors for 10 days.<sup>†</sup> You may remove your mask sooner than 10 days if you have two sequential negative tests at least one day apart.
    - Avoid contact with people at high risk\* for severe COVID-19 for 10 days.<sup>†</sup>

### **Updated Post-Exposure Guidance for COVID-19:**

Providers should recommend the following practices to individuals who have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19:

- **IF Symptoms Present:**
  - Test immediately if you experience new COVID-19 symptoms, regardless of exposure status.
  - Mask indoors for 10 days after exposure when around high-risk\* individuals.
  
- **IF Asymptomatic:**
  - Test within 5 days of exposure if you meet either of the following criteria:
    - You are personally at high risk\* for severe COVID-19 and would benefit from treatment.
    - You have contact with individuals who are at high risk\* for severe COVID-19. Test prior to contact with these individuals.
  - Mask indoors for 10 days after exposure when around high-risk\* individuals.

*\*Individuals at high risk for developing severe COVID-19 include: “the elderly, those who live in congregate care facilities, those who have immunocompromising conditions, and those with other conditions that put them at higher risk for serious illness.”*

*<sup>†</sup>Day 0 is defined as the date of symptom onset, or the positive test date for asymptomatic individuals.*

### **Where Do the New Guidelines Apply?**

In the following settings, these updated January 2024 COVID-19 guidelines:

- **APPLY:** General public, schools, childcare facilities, and most workplaces. Workplaces are still also subject to the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Non-Emergency Regulations](#) and [Cal/OSHA Aerosol](#)

[Transmissible Diseases \(ATD\) Standard](#) and should consult those recommendations for additional requirements.

- **DO NOT APPLY:** Acute care hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, and skilled nursing facilities (SNFs), where stricter recommendations from [AFL 21-08.9](#) are still in place. These guidelines also do not apply during an outbreak, where the [Workplace Outbreak Employer Guidance](#) should be followed.
- **OPTIONAL:** Healthcare settings (e.g., outpatient clinics, ambulatory surgical centers) and high-risk congregate settings (e.g., incarcerated settings, shelters) may choose to follow the stricter healthcare recommendations or implement workplace-specific protocols, as indicated.

#### **Continued Recommendations for Prevention:**

Providers should continue to encourage the following prevention steps for general protection against winter respiratory viruses:

- Keep vaccines up to date, including COVID-19 and influenza
- If you experience symptoms:
  - Test for COVID-19 and influenza
  - Stay home until you feel better
- If you test positive, discuss treatment options with a healthcare provider as soon as possible
- Consider wearing a high-quality mask in indoor public places
- Cover your cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands with soap and water (or use sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if no soap and water is available)

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- [CDPH COVID-19 Isolation Guidance](#)
- [CDPH COVID-19 Isolation Q&A](#)
- [CDPH COVID-19 Testing Guidance](#)
- [CDPH Order of the State Public Health Officer Beyond the Blueprint](#)
- [CDPH Order of the State Public Health Officer Q&A](#)
- [CDPH Healthcare Setting Guidelines \(AFL 21-08.9\)](#)
- [CDPH K-12 Guidance 2023-24 School Year](#)
- [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Non-Emergency Regulations](#)
- [Workplace Outbreak Employer Guidance](#)

**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.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.