



DATE:	11/11/2020
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Rachel Levine, MD, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Updated Guidance to Patients Evaluated for 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 Update”: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; **EMS COUNCILS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **FQHCs:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE **LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP; **LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES:** PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, INFECTION CONTROL, AND NURSING STAFF IN YOUR FACILITY

- Healthcare providers who are evaluating patients for COVID-19 should instruct the patient to isolate. Patients should be asked to develop a list of people who were in close contact (defined as being within 6 feet for a period of 15 minutes or more depending upon the exposure) with them from the period 48 hours before symptom onset to the time at which the patient isolated.
- All persons diagnosed with COVID-19 should self-isolate until at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset, and symptoms are improving, including being afebrile, for 24 hours without antipyretics.
- These steps should be taken immediately. Do not wait for test results to come in.
- Close contacts of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases should be instructed to self-quarantine for 14 days from the last known exposure to the patient being evaluated for COVID-19.
- Close contacts are recommended to be tested at least 2-3 days after their exposure.
- A negative test result does not release a close contact from quarantine early. The full 14-day quarantine must be observed.
- Healthcare providers should give the attached document to any patient being evaluated for COVID-19.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is asking that clinicians provide the current guidance on isolation to patients being evaluated for COVID-19 to ensure that timely recommendations are provided to reduce spread of disease.

Please report any confirmed cases of SARS COV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, through the DOH electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS.

Instructions for Patients Waiting for COVID-19 Test Results

- Self-isolate at home.
- Compose a list of close contacts. Currently, a “close contact” is defined as being within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more from the period 48 hours before symptom onset to the time at which the patient went into isolation.
- If the patient lives with others, self-isolate in a private room and use a private bathroom if possible.
- Wear a mask when entering general living areas and interacting with others.
- If the patient develops additional symptoms or if their symptoms get worse, they should notify their healthcare provider.

Instructions for Patients with Positive Test Results

- Self-isolate at home.
- Monitor symptoms.
- Notify close contacts (including in your workplace) and ask that they self-quarantine. Currently, a “close contact” is defined as being within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more from the period 48 hours before symptom onset to the time at which the patient went into isolation. Additional information about how close contact is defined and a few exceptions to this definition can be found in [PA-HAN-533](#).
- Under the [CDC's symptom-based strategy](#), patients with COVID-19 should self-isolate until:
 - At least 10 days after symptom onset, AND;
 - Symptoms are improving, including being afebrile, for 24 hours without antipyretics.
- Some patients with severe illness may need to be isolated for up to [20 days](#) after symptom onset.

Instructions for Close Contacts of Patients Diagnosed with COVID-19

- Currently, a “close contact” is defined as being within 6 feet for a period of 15 minutes or more depending upon the exposure from the period 48 hours before symptom onset to the time at which the patient isolated. There are some exceptions to this definition, as detailed in [PA-HAN-533](#).
- Close contacts of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 should be instructed by the patient to self-quarantine for 14 days from the last known contact with the patient. Household contacts who cannot separate from the case need to quarantine for 14 days after the case's infectious period ends, which may be a minimum of 24 days after the case is identified.
- DOH recommends that anyone identified as a close contact be tested [at least 2-3 days](#) after their exposure. A negative test result does not allow a close contact to be released from quarantine early.
- Because infection can develop up to 14 days after exposure, close contacts with a negative test result must still quarantine for the full 14 days.
- If a close contact develops symptoms during those 14 days, they should be tested by a healthcare provider for COVID-19. If a close contact tests positive for COVID-19, they should follow the **“Instructions for Patients with Positive Test Results”** above.
- Close contacts who are healthcare personnel (HCP) should be instructed to notify occupational health immediately for additional information. Unless the facility where the HCP is employed is currently operating under crisis standards of care for staffing, close contacts who are HCP must quarantine for 14 days and be excluded from work, as described in [PA-HAN-510](#).

COVID-19 Patients who are Healthcare Providers

- Patients diagnosed with COVID-19 who are HCP should contact their supervisor and occupational health to report their diagnosis and isolate at home. HCP include, but are not limited to, emergency medical service personnel, nurses, nursing assistants, physicians, technicians, therapists, phlebotomists, pharmacists, students and trainees, contractual staff not employed by the healthcare facility, and persons not directly involved in patient care, but who could be

exposed to infectious agents that can be transmitted in the healthcare setting (e.g., clerical, dietary, environmental services, laundry, security, engineering and facilities management, administrative, billing, volunteer personnel).

- These individuals should follow guidance in [PA-HAN-516](#).
- Most HCP who are diagnosed with COVID-19 should be excluded from work until:
 - At least 10 days have passed since symptom onset, AND;
 - Symptoms are improving, including being afebrile, for 24 hours without antipyretics
 - HCP with severe to critical illness, or who are severely immunocompromised, will require a longer period of exclusion as described in [PA-HAN-516](#).

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

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.

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

This information is current as of November 11, 2020 but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.