

July 29, 2020

Dear Colleague:

I am writing to make you aware of recent changes to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 guidance related to discontinuing isolation and testing after recovery. This guidance has implications for patients returning to you for care and for individuals returning to work or school.

Patients with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection **DO NOT need to have two negative tests at least 24 hours apart to return to work, school or receive medical care.** CDC has reported that COVID-19 cases can continue to test positive for up to 12 weeks after their initial positive test, but that they are only potentially infectious to others for about 10 days.

As such, for most individuals with COVID-19 illness, isolation can be discontinued 10 days after symptom onset and **resolution of fever for at least 24 hours**, without the use of fever-reducing medications, and with **improvement of symptoms** (changed from “improvement in respiratory symptoms” to address expanding list of symptoms associated with COVID-19).

The decision to discontinue isolation for patients with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection should be made using a symptom-based strategy, not additional testing:

- Individuals who had mild or moderate illness and are not severely immunocompromised can return to work after:
 - At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared and
 - **At least 24 hours** have passed since last fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and
 - **Symptoms** (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) have improved
- Individuals who had severe to critical illness or who are severely immunocompromised can return to work after:
 - At least 20 days have passed since symptoms first appeared
 - **At least 24 hours** have passed since last fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and
 - **Symptoms** (e.g., cough, shortness of breath) have improved

Asymptomatic persons with confirmed COVID-19:

- Who are not severely immunocompromised can return to work after
 - At least 10 days have passed since the positive laboratory test and the person remains asymptomatic
- Who are severely immunocompromised can return to work after
 - At least 20 days have passed since the positive laboratory test and the person remains asymptomatic

Asymptomatic persons who test positive and later develop symptoms should follow the guidance for symptomatic persons above.

Definitions of mild to moderate and severe illness, and of severe immunocompromise, as well as more information about the science behind the symptom-based return to work can be found at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/strategy-discontinue-isolation.html>

Please note, the recommendation of 10 days is specifically for those who test positive for the coronavirus and have self-isolated. It does not apply to people who need to quarantine to keep from potentially spreading the virus. The incubation period for the virus is 14 days, so anyone who has been exposed to the virus still needs to quarantine and monitor for symptoms.

This updated guidance reflects a better understanding of the science around COVID-19. It eliminates practices that were once thought to be critical in preventing further transmission of COVID-19, but now are medically unnecessary. In addition, eliminating the recommendation for repeat testing after recovery will help ease the burden on testing capacities, both in Georgia and nationwide, that are stretched to their limits almost daily.

Please urge your patients to wear a mask, practice social distancing and wash their hands frequently. Making them aware of contact tracing efforts that are ongoing in the state and asking them to answer the call when DPH reaches out will help prevent further spread of COVID-19.

Working together, we can **and will** save lives and get through this pandemic. Thank you for all you are doing to keep Georgians healthy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kathleen E. Toomey".

Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner & State Health Officer