COVID-19 Return to Work Guide for Healthcare Workers

Safety is of the utmost importance for Alberta Health Services (AHS). As an AHS healthcare worker you may experience many different emotions around symptoms, self-isolation, and testing. This guide will help you understand when it is appropriate to return to work after you have experienced symptoms, been tested for COVID-19, or been self-isolating. Expedited returns to work will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and must be discussed with your leader and approved by Zone Emergency Operations Centres.

For help determining when you can return to work, see the Return to Work Decision Chart.

1) I've been told to quarantine for 14 days because of recent travel or a potential COVID-19 exposure – what happens next?

- If you've recently travelled or been exposed to COVID-19 (e.g., close contact* to a person with COVID-19 without appropriate personal protective equipment), then you are legally required (under public health order) to quarantine for a full 14 days.

- When someone is infected with a contagious disease, there is some time between being exposed and becoming sick. People who get COVID-19 disease usually start developing symptoms two to 14 days after exposure. By quarantining during this time, it protects others from being exposed to a potentially infectious person.

- If you develop new symptoms or a worsening of symptoms that are related to a pre-existing illness or health condition during your 14-day quarantine, then you must take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing.

- If you are tested for COVID-19 during your 14-day quarantine and the test result is positive, then see Question #8.

- If you are tested for COVID-19 during your 14-day quarantine and the test result is negative, then you can go back to work after your 14-day quarantine OR after your symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.

- If you develop any of the following specific symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or a runny nose) during your 14-day quarantine period and you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue the 14-day quarantine due to the exposure, or isolate for 10 days after onset of symptoms, or until symptoms are gone – **whichever is longer**..

  - For example: a healthcare worker starts quarantine on Sept. 1. On Sept. 6, this healthcare worker develops fever, cough, and sore throat, and these symptoms <u>fully resolve</u> by Sept. 12. In this scenario, the healthcare worker would need to self-isolate for 10 days from symptom onset (the symptom onset date of Sept. 6 would be "day 0"), and so the isolation would end at the completion of Sept. 16, and the healthcare worker could return to work on Sept. 17.

- If you develop any other new onset symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition during your 14-day quarantine, and you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must continue to quarantine for the 14 days or until your symptoms are gone - **whichever is longer.**

- If you don't have any symptoms during your 14-day quarantine, then you can go back to work when the full 14 days of quarantine are complete.

2) I have NOT recently travelled outside of Canada and I have NOT been potentially exposed to COVID-19. I have developed symptoms – what happens next?

- If you didn't travel and do not believe you were exposed, and you have developed new onset (or worsening of chronic symptoms) cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you must isolate and take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing. All Albertans with these symptoms are legally required (under public health order) to isolate for 10 days; **however, if you have no known exposure to the virus and you have tested negative for COVID-19, then you are NOT legally required to isolate** (but you should stay home and avoid contact with others until your symptoms have resolved). If you have no travel or exposure history and you have developed a cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose but you are NOT tested for COVID-19, then you must isolate for 10 days after onset of symptoms or until symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.

- If you didn't travel and do not believe you were exposed, and you have developed any other symptoms (that are not listed in the preceding bullet) that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you should take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing. If you don't have cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose, then you are NOT legally required to self-isolate while awaiting testing; however, you should stay home and minimize contact with others.

- If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see Question #8.

- If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is negative, and you did not have travel or have a known exposure in the past two weeks, then you can go back to work after your symptoms resolve, even if you had developed a cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose (the negative test eliminates the legal requirement to isolate for 10 days). Note that a cough may persist for several weeks after recovering from a viral respiratory illness, but this does not mean that the individual with the post-viral cough is infectious. Someone who has recovered from a viral respiratory illness but still has a cough (and no other symptoms) does not need to continue to isolate; however, if their chronic cough worsens, then they should take the COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing.

- If you have no travel or exposure history, develop new onset symptoms, but are NOT tested for COVID-19, then:
  - If your symptoms include any of the following: cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose, then you must isolate for 10 days after onset of symptoms or until symptoms resolve – **whichever is longer**.
  - If your symptoms do NOT include cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose, then you must remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms resolve.

3) I wasn't exposed to COVID-19 and I haven't travelled outside Canada within the past two weeks, but I'm not feeling well. When I used the online COVID-19 self-assessment, it indicated that I don't need to be tested for COVID-19. When can I go back to work?

- If you develop new onset symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, but none of these symptoms warranted testing for COVID-19, then you must remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms resolve.

- If you develop new or additional symptoms since the last time you took the COVID-19 self-assessment, then you should stay home and take the COVID-19 self-assessment again.

4) **Someone in my household is quarantining and doesn't have any symptoms. I don't have any symptoms either. Do I need to isolate?**

- If the person you live with doesn't have any symptoms and you don't either, then you don't need to isolate. You can go to work like normal *unless* you've travelled outside Canada within the past two weeks or you've had another possible COVID-19 exposure – such as close contact* with someone who has COVID-19 without wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

5) **Someone in my household is isolating and has symptoms. We're just waiting for test results. I don't have any symptoms – do I need to isolate?**

- If the person you live with developed acute respiratory illness symptoms within 14 days of being in close contact* with someone with laboratory confirmed COVID-19, then you need to quarantine, because this person would be considered a probable case. You should quarantine for 14 days, starting from the last time you had close contact* with this person.

- If the person you live with developed acute respiratory illness symptoms within 14 days of returning from travel outside Canada, then you need to quarantine for 14 days starting from the last time you had close contact* with this individual.

- If the person you live with hasn't travelled outside Canada in the last two weeks and has not had any known exposure to the COVID-19 virus, then you don't need to quarantine and you can work like normal. However, if this person's test results are positive for COVID-19, then you would need to quarantine for 14 days starting from the last time you had close contact* with this person.

- NOTE: For the above three bullets, if you have ongoing close contact with a person in your household who is a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19, then "the last time you had close contact" is the date when the case is no longer considered infectious, which is 10 days after the case's symptom onset (or 10 days after specimen collection if the case tested positive but never developed symptoms). Your 14-day quarantine period would then begin after this date.

- However, if you develop symptoms that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then see Question #2 for further direction.

6) **I've had a nagging cough since October. My manager told me that I should stay home until the cough is gone, but I feel fine otherwise. Is it safe for me to go to work?**

- COVID-19 usually causes new symptoms or makes chronic symptoms much worse. If you have a chronic symptom like a cough, that hasn't really changed much for weeks (or months), and you've seen a doctor and you don't currently have an infection that you could pass onto someone else, then it's okay for you to work.

- It's okay for people with a chronic cough or reactive airway disease to go back to work after they've been sick if they're still coughing, as long as it's not worse and they don't have any other symptoms.

7) **I had some symptoms last week, so I decided to isolate. I haven't travelled and don't believe I've been exposed to anyone with COVID-19. My symptoms are better now and I was never tested for COVID-19. Do I need to stay off work for 14 days?**

- A 14-day quarantine period is required if you have been potentially exposed to the COVID-19 virus (such as recent travel or close contact* to a person with COVID-19 without appropriate personal protective equipment). See Question #1 regarding 14-day quarantine requirements, as well as the online COVID-19 self-assessment.

- Any healthcare worker who has developed a cough, fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or a runny nose that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition must isolate and take

the online COVID-19 self-assessment.

- If you've had these symptoms but haven't travelled or had any known exposure to COVID-19, and you haven't been tested, then you should isolate for 10 days after your symptoms started OR until your symptoms are gone – **whichever is longer**.

- If you have any other new onset symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then you should take the online COVID-19 self-assessment for consideration of COVID-19 testing. If you are NOT tested, or if you are tested and the result is negative, then you must remain off work and limit contact with others until your symptoms resolve. If you are tested for COVID-19 and the test result is positive, then see Question #8.

8) **I tested positive for COVID-19. When can I go back to work?**

- Like all Albertans, if you have tested positive for COVID-19, then you are legally required to isolate for 10 days from when your symptoms started or until your symptoms are gone, whichever is longer. If you were tested while you were asymptomatic and you never developed symptoms, then you should isolate for 10 days after the date that your specimen was collected for COVID-19 testing.

- You can return to work after you isolation period, as described in the preceding bullet, is complete.

9) **I am asymptomatic, and I was tested for COVID-19 and the result was negative – what happens next?**

- If you've recently returned from travel outside of Canada or been exposed to COVID-19 (through close contact* to a person with COVID-19 without appropriate personal protective equipment), then you are legally required to quarantine for the full 14 days. If you don't have any symptoms and are tested for COVID-19 during your 14-day self-isolation and the result is negative, then you can go back to work when the required 14 days of quarantine are complete.

- If you have NOT recently travelled outside of Canada and have NOT been exposed to COVID-19, then you can continue to work as per usual if you are asymptomatic, both while awaiting your COVID-19 test result, and also after receiving a negative test result.

10) **I just received notice that a classmate of my child has tested positive. As a result, I have to keep my child home from school. Am I allowed to go to work?**

- In this situation, your child would be considered a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

   o If your child is asymptomatic and you are asymptomatic, then you can continue to work as usual.

   o If your child has developed a fever, cough, shortness of breath, or loss of sense of smell or taste, that is not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, then your child will be required to isolate at home. As well, if you were a close contact with your child, then you would have to quarantine for 14 days from last exposure – see Question #1. COVID-19 testing of your child is encouraged.

   o If your child has developed any other symptoms (that are not listed in the preceding bullet) that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from their usual symptoms, then COVID-19 testing of your child is encouraged. If you are asymptomatic, then you can continue to work as usual while awaiting your child's test result, or if your child is not tested.

   o If your child tests positive for COVID-19 and you are a close contact with your child then you would have to quarantine for 14 days from last exposure – see Question #1.

   o NOTE: If you have to quarantine due to your child and you have ongoing close contact with your child, then your "last exposure" is the date when your child is no longer considered infectious,

which is 10 days after their symptom onset (or 10 days after specimen collection if your child tested positive but never developed symptoms). Your 14-day quarantine period would then begin <u>after</u> this date.

- o While your child is quarantining or isolating at home, if you develop symptoms that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from your usual symptoms, then:
    - o See Question #1 if your child had developed a fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or runny nose that was not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, and/or if your child had tested positive for COVID-19.
    - o See Question #2 if your child developed any other symptoms (that are not listed in the preceding bullet) that are new, or not related to a pre-existing health condition, or a change from their usual symptoms, or your child has remained asymptomatic, or your child was tested for COVID-19 and the result was negative.
- o See Guidance for Parents of Children Attending School and/or Childcare for more information.

11) I recently had my flu shot and then I developed symptoms – what should I do?

- If you have recently been immunized, you may experience side effects from the vaccine. It's not unusual to experience redness, swelling, bruising, or feeling sore where you had the needle – such symptoms are typically mild, go away in a few days, and don't require you to stay off work

- Sometimes, people may experience symptoms that go beyond the injection site, and such symptoms are similar to symptoms of COVID-19, including: chills, feeling tired (fatigue), headache, body aches, poor appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, or diarrhea.

- If you develop any of these symptoms within 24 hours after immunization, then you should stay home and not come in to work.

    - o **If these symptoms resolve** within 48 hours after starting, then you can return to work unless you have been instructed to quarantine or isolate for other reasons.

    - o **If these symptoms persist** for more than 48 hours - and are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition – then you must not return to work and should continue to stay home and away from others. Please complete the online COVID- 19 self-assessment tool for healthcare workers and follow the guidance provided.

- It is very rare for an adult to develop respiratory symptoms as a side effect of an influenza vaccine injection. If you develop respiratory symptoms shortly after immunization, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sore throat, or runny nose, then these symptoms should **NOT** be assumed to be due to the influenza vaccine. You should stay home and away from others, and complete the online COVID- 19 self-assessment tool for healthcare workers and follow the guidance provided.

- Please see the Post Influenza Immunization After-care Guidance during COVID-19 for more information.

*Close Contact is defined as a person who:

- Provided direct care for the case (including healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers), or who had other similar close physical contact (e.g. intimate partner, hug, kiss, handshake) without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment; **OR**
- Lived with or otherwise had close prolonged contact which may be cumulative, i.e. multiple interactions for a total of 15 minutes or more and within two metres with a case without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment; **OR**
- Had direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of a case (e.g. shared cigarettes, glasses/bottles, eating utensils) or was coughed or sneezed on while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment.