

Frequently Asked Questions: CDC Updates and Shortens Recommended Isolation and Quarantine Period for General Population

Isolation

Why does CDC not require a test at the end of isolation?

The majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after. PCR and antigen tests are authorized for SARS-CoV-2 diagnosis and are best used early in the course of illness for purposes of diagnosis. Some people may remain positive by PCR test beyond the period of expected infectiousness. The importance of a positive antigen test late in the course of illness is unclear and does not necessarily mean a person can easily spread the virus.

Why do those who end isolation after 5 days only require a face mask and not an N95?

The majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after. Wearing a [well-fitting mask](#) following isolation will decrease the small risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to others. Respirators (e.g., N95s) are a useful option for personal protective equipment to protect people from exposures in specific settings.

Why are isolation recommendations the same for those who are unvaccinated, vaccinated, and boosted?

COVID-19 vaccination decreases the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death from infection. It also decreases the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection, with a further decrease in risk for those who are boosted. Based on the available data, anyone who becomes infected with SARS-CoV-2, regardless of vaccination status, is maximally infectious for approximately the same amount of time. Early data of the Omicron variant confirm that breakthrough infections result in a similar duration of viral shedding and similar risk of transmission compared to infections in unvaccinated individuals, especially during periods of maximal infectiousness. Regardless of vaccination status, the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after.

Quarantine

Why are the recommendations for quarantine different for those who are fully vaccinated and those who are boosted?

Data consistently show that people who are boosted or are less than 6 months out from their primary mRNA series (or <2 months from the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine) have the highest level of protection from COVID-19. In the UK, vaccine effectiveness for mRNA vaccines against symptomatic disease with Omicron was 88% 2-9 weeks after vaccination and dropped to 34-37% at ≥ 15 weeks after a 2-dose vaccination; vaccine effectiveness again increased to 75% after a booster dose. Similarly, in South Africa two doses of an mRNA vaccine provided only 33% protection against COVID-19 infection during the Omicron wave. Given the increased protection against Omicron infection following a booster dose, those who have received a booster dose are at low risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection and are, therefore, at lower risk of transmission to others during the period following exposure.

Following exposure (or during isolation and in the 5 days following), do I need to wear a mask in my home?

CDC has always recommended that during periods of quarantine (and isolation) all members of the household should wear a well-fitted mask, even inside the home. If possible, one member of the household should care for the person who is in quarantine (or isolation) to limit potential exposures. This is especially important if there are people who are unvaccinated, vaccinated and not yet boosted, or immunocompromised inside the home. Following exposure (or during isolation and in the 5 days following), individuals should continue to wear a mask at home.