

August 12, 2022

Exposure Guidance: What to do if you were exposed to someone with COVID-19

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. The most common symptoms of the disease are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may also include fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea. Most people with COVID-19 will have mild disease, but some people will get sicker and may need to be hospitalized. If you have contracted the virus, symptoms may develop within 2 to 14 days, with a median of 4-5 days, from exposure. Unless precautions are taken, your health is at risk, and other people may possibly contract this disease from you.

If you were exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 or have been told by a healthcare provider or public health authority that you were exposed, here are the steps that you should take, regardless of your vaccination status or if you have had a previous infection:

- For 10 days after your exposure, wear a high-quality mask or respirator (e.g., N95) any time you are around others inside your home or indoors in public.
- Do not go to places where you are unable to wear a mask, including travel and public transportation settings.

If you are not sick, you should monitor your health for symptoms of COVID-19 during the 10 days following the last time you were in close contact with a sick person with COVID-19. A list of these symptoms can be found under “COVID-19 Testing” below. Monitoring your health includes checking your temperature twice a day and watching for symptoms for 10 days. If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 at any time, you should follow the guidance in the section below titled “What should I do if I am a close contact to someone with COVID-19 and get sick?”

Even if you remain asymptomatic, it is recommended that you seek testing after at least 5 days have passed since your most recent exposure, if possible. The test should be a diagnostic test (PCR or antigen). See more information about testing below.

- If you test negative, continue taking precautions through day 10.
- If you test positive, please follow DPH guidance for isolation <https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact>

It is recommended that you avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk of severe disease, and those in nursing homes and other high-risk settings until at least 10 days after your last exposure, regardless of any test results during that time.

COVID-19 Testing

It is recommended that you seek testing after at least 5 days have passed since your most recent exposure or sooner if you develop symptoms. The test should be a diagnostic test (PCR or antigen) and can be an at-home test or performed by a provider. You should obtain a test earlier if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Fever (measured temperature above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, or you feel feverish)
- Chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

You can find information on where to find an in-person COVID-19 testing location here <https://dph.georgia.gov/covidtesting>. If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 at any point during the 10 days after your exposure, please also follow the guidance below “What should I do if I am a close contact to someone with COVID-19 and get sick?”

If you test positive for COVID-19, regardless of your symptom status, you must follow DPH isolation guidelines <https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact>.

What should I do if I am a close contact to someone with COVID-19 and get sick?

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 (even if your symptoms are very mild), you must stay at home and away from other people regardless of your vaccination status until one of the following is fulfilled:

- If you are tested for COVID-19 while symptomatic using a diagnostic provider performed or at-home test (PCR or antigen) and you are negative, you can return to normal activities once your symptoms resolve. You should still follow recommendations above for the entire 10 days after a known exposure, even if you test negative for COVID-19. The most important thing is to stay home while you are sick.
- If you are tested for COVID-19 while symptomatic using a diagnostic provider performed or at-home test (PCR or antigen) and you are **positive**, or if you do **NOT** get tested, you should follow isolation guidance found here: <https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact>

In general, when you are sick:

- Call 911 immediately if you believe you are experiencing a medical emergency. You must inform 911 that you may be sick with COVID-19 and wear a mask.
- If it is not an emergency, but you are sick and require medical care, please contact your primary care doctor, an urgent care clinic, or your local federally qualified healthcare center.
- If you are mildly ill and do not require medical care, you can find information on COVID-19 testing locations here <https://dph.georgia.gov/covidtesting>
- The information provided here is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Return to Work and School/Child Care Guidance After Exposure or Illness

- If you are returning to work after exposure to COVID-19, please follow the guidance above regarding precautions you should take after exposure to protect others from COVID-19 at work or school
- **If you become sick with COVID-19**, please review DPH isolation guidance for information: <https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact>

Additional CDC Guidance

- CDC Isolation guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html>
- CDC Exposure guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/if-you-were-exposed.html>

Contact information for the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH): 1-866-PUB-HLTH (782-4584)