

August 12, 2022

Isolation Guidance: What to do if you are sick with COVID-19

If you have tested positive for COVID-19 infection or if a healthcare provider or public health official has told you that COVID-19 infection is suspected, you must follow the home isolation instructions below. These steps will help prevent the disease from spreading to others in your household and community. You should also follow these instructions if you suspect that you have COVID-19, even if you do not have a known exposure. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath.

If you have tested positive for COVID-19 infection, you may be contacted by the Department of Public Health for information regarding your illness. Regardless of whether you are contacted or not, please notify your close contacts of your illness. More information for your close contacts can be found here: <https://dph.georgia.gov/contact>.

Although tests performed under the supervision of a healthcare provider are preferred, if you test positive on an at-home test, you should follow guidance for a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, though you may not be contacted by public health.

Isolation Instructions:

Stay home except to get medical care

You must not go outside your home unless you need medical care or in the event of an emergency, such as a fire. Do not go to work, school, or public areas, and do not use public transportation, Uber/Lyft, or taxis. If seeking medical care, always call ahead to alert the healthcare provider that you have or may have COVID-19.

Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home

As much as possible, you should stay in a different room from other people in your home. You should use a separate bathroom, if available. The CDC currently recommends keeping 6 feet between yourself and others, if possible. Prohibit visitors to your home as much as possible.

Wear a well-fitting face mask

You should wear a well-fitting face mask (this can be a cloth mask) when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle), pets, and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are not able to wear a face mask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then people who live with you should not stay in the same room with you, or they should wear a face mask if they enter your room.

Appropriate hygiene

Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If handwashing with soap is not possible, use alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to thoroughly cover all surfaces of your hands, then rub until they feel dry. Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, or nose with unwashed hands. If you cough or sneeze, do so into your elbow or use a tissue to cover your mouth.

Avoid sharing household items

You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, bedding, or other items with other people in your home. After using these items, you should wash them thoroughly with soap and water.

Clean “high-touch” surfaces frequently

Use a household cleaning spray or wipe, according to the label instructions. Labels contain instructions for safe and effective use of the cleaning product including precautions you should take when applying the product, such as wearing gloves and making sure you have good ventilation during use of the product.

Monitor your symptoms

If you develop worsening symptoms (i.e., difficulty breathing) you should seek prompt medical attention. Be sure to call your healthcare provider before seeking care and tell them that you have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Wear a facemask before entering the healthcare facility to protect other patients and staff from being exposed.

If you have a medical emergency, call 911. Notify emergency services that you have COVID-19 infection. Put on a facemask if possible before emergency services arrive.

You may discontinue home isolation if you had symptoms when:

- At least 5 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

You may discontinue home isolation if you did NOT have symptoms when:

- At least 5 days have passed since the positive laboratory test and you remain asymptomatic
- Note, if you later develop symptoms, you should follow the guidance for symptomatic persons above.

To determine when 5 days have passed, you can consider day 0 of isolation defined as either the date your symptoms started, if symptomatic, or the date of your first positive test, if asymptomatic.

After you leave isolation, you should continue to wear a mask around others until 10 days have passed since your positive laboratory test or symptom onset. Please see more information about mask wearing after leaving isolation, including what to do if you are unable to wear a mask here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html#when-to-isolate>. After 10 days, please continue to follow local masking recommendations or ordinances.

Regardless of the day you leave isolation or ability to wear a mask, you should avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, and nursing homes and other high-risk settings, until after at least 10 days.

After you have ended isolation, if your COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen, restart your isolation at day 0. Talk to a healthcare provider if you have questions about your symptoms or when to end isolation.

**A limited number of persons with severe illness (you were admitted to a hospital and needed oxygen) or persons with a weakened immune system (immunocompromised) due to a health condition or medication may transmit virus for a longer time after infection. This may warrant extending isolation up to 10 days or using a viral test to determine when to end isolation. Consider consultation with your medical provider and infection control experts.*

COVID-19 Vaccination and Isolation

Vaccinated persons (even vaccinated persons who have received boosters or additional doses and are considered up to date) should continue to follow all DPH guidance to protect themselves and others and should follow isolation guidance above if positive for COVID-19.

If you or your close contacts have questions about the COVID-19 vaccine, please visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine> or call our COVID-19 vaccination hotline at (888) 357-0169.

Additional CDC Guidance

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

CDC Travel guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

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