

COVID-19 Return to Work Guide for Community Physicians and Teams

This guide is relevant for primary care providers and specialists within the community setting as well as their teams.

For help determining if you should return to work, see the [COVID-19 Assessment Tool For Health Care Workers](#), which is a decision-flow tool offered on the Alberta Health website. It also includes information on expedited return to work for asymptomatic persons.

Public Health Orders

To protect the health and safety of Albertans, the following [public health orders](#) have been put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- You are legally required to [self-isolate](#) for 14 days if you:
 - Returned from travel outside of Canada
 - Are close contact* of someone with confirmed COVID-19
 - Are close contact* of symptomatic traveler who has returned from travel outside of Canada
 - Had laboratory exposure to biological material known to contain COVID-19
- You are legally required to self-isolate for 10-days from the start of symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat) which are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition OR until your symptoms resolve whichever takes longer.
- For confirmed positive COVID-19 tests, healthcare workers must remain off work for 14 days from onset of symptoms or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.

Possible Return to Work Scenarios

1) I was already under 14 day quarantine as per public health order when I developed symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat), how long do I remain off work?

- Mandatory self-isolation for 10 days will start when your symptoms started or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.
- Healthcare workers cannot **return to work** for 14 days from when symptoms started or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.
- At start of symptoms, complete the [online self-assessment tool](#) for HealthCare Workers (HCW)/Public Health Enforcement (PHE) and if you require testing, you will be able to book an appointment.

2) I am experiencing COVID-19 symptoms while at work, what should I do?

- Immediately wash hands (or hand sanitizer) and put procedure mask on, ensure distance of 2 m from others, strict adherence to hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette while exiting building to self-isolate at home.
- Clinic should immediately clean and disinfect all surfaces and areas you may have come in contact with while not wearing proper PPE. To clean environmental surfaces and medical equipment, use any disinfectant that has a Drug Identification Number (DIN) and a virucidal claim. Alternatively, you can make a 1000ppm bleach water solution by mixing 20 ml (4 teaspoons) of unscented, household bleach with 1000 ml (4 cups) of water. Ensure the surface remains wet with the bleach water solution for 1 minute. Please see [Environmental Cleaning Guidelines during COVID-19 for Community Physicians and Teams](#) for more information.
- Complete the [online self-assessment tool](#) for HCW/PHE and if you require testing, you will be able to book an appointment.

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- You will now remain in **self-isolation** for 10 days from start of symptoms or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer. You cannot **return to work** for 14 days or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.
- Alberta Health Services (AHS) may be in contact with the clinic to provide the necessary public health guidance.

3) My test came back negative, when can I go back to work?

- Regardless of the negative swab, if you HAVE had any exposure to the following without the proper PPE then you must remain in quarantine for the 14 days as per public health order:
 - Returned from travel outside of Canada, OR
 - Are close contact* of someone with confirmed COVID-19, OR
 - Are close contact* of symptomatic traveler who has returned from travel outside of Canada, OR
 - Had laboratory exposure to biological material known to contain COVID-19
- If you HAVE NOT had exposure to the above or were wearing proper PPE during exposure then you may return to work once your symptoms resolve.
- 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 2 to 14 days after exposure. By isolating during this time, it protects others from being exposed to a potentially infectious person.

4) Someone I live with (partner, spouse, kids, etc.) has developed symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat) but we do not have confirmed test results, do I need to self isolate?

- You only need to [self-isolate](#) if the person you live with has developed symptoms within 14 days of:
 - Returning from travel outside of Canada, OR
 - Being in close contact* of someone with confirmed COVID-19, OR
 - Being a close contact* of a symptomatic traveler who has returned from travel outside of Canada, OR
 - Laboratory exposure to biological material known to contain COVID-19
- If none of the above apply then you do not need to self-isolate and can continue to work.
- If you develop symptoms, then you must immediately self-isolate and complete the [online self-assessment tool](#) for HCW/PHE. If you require testing, you will be contacted to book an appointment.

5) I am asymptomatic and under 14 day quarantine under public health order but believe there is a critical need for me to return back to work because of staff shortages, what can I do?

- If you (self-employed) or your employer have identified a **critical** need for your return to work because of staff shortages that are threatening operations, the [Zone Medical Officer of Health](#) (ZMOH) will determine if your return to work involves reasonably low risk to the public's health. If the ZMOH deems you critical and necessary to return to work, then you will need to follow precautions found in [Expedited Return to Work for Asymptomatic Persons](#).

6) How do I know if I or anyone in my clinic should self-isolate after a clinic exposure to a COVID-19 confirmed patient?

- Staff will only need to self-isolate for 14 days if proper PPE was NOT worn during any of the close contact exposure with patient. Following the [PPE for Patients with COVID-19](#) will help you determine if proper PPE was worn in the clinic environment.

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- If proper PPE was not in place during close contact or laboratory exposure to biological material known to contain COVID-19 then you are legally required to immediately self-isolate for 14 days.
- If proper PPE was worn during close contact with COVID-19 case, then staff can continue to work after completing proper disposal of PPE.
- Clinic should immediately clean and disinfect all surfaces and areas you may have come in contact with while wearing proper PPE. To clean environmental surfaces and medical equipment, use any disinfectant that has a Drug Identification Number (DIN) and a virucidal claim. Alternatively, you can make a 1000ppm bleach water solution by mixing 20 ml (4 teaspoons) of unscented, household bleach with 1000 ml (4 cups) of water. Ensure the surface remains wet with the bleach water solution for 1 minute. Please see [Environmental Cleaning Guidelines during COVID-19 for Community Physicians and Teams](#) for more information.

7) Who can I contact if I have further questions about an exposure or return to work question?

Health Link has set up two phone lines for physicians to call with concerns about themselves.

South of Red Deer: 587-284-5302
Red Deer and North: 780-910-0385

It is critical these phone numbers be used by physicians only and not members of the general public or physician family members. During this time of increased pressure on the health system, we are using these numbers to help ensure physicians get the advice they need quickly.

***Close contacts** are defined as individuals:

- Who provided care for an infected individual, including healthcare workers, family members or other caregivers, or who had other similar close physical contact without consistent appropriate use of PPE
- OR**
- Had direct contact with infectious bodily fluids of a person (e.g., was coughed or sneezed on) while not wearing recommended appropriate PPE.
- OR**
- Lived with or otherwise had close prolonged contact (i.e., for more than 15 minutes and within two metres) with a case without consistent and appropriate use of PPE up to 48 hours prior to symptom onset or while the case was symptomatic and not isolated.

A healthcare worker in an occupational setting wearing the recommended PPE is not considered to be a close contact. AHS Public Health will work with COVID-19 positive cases to identify and notify close contacts.

More Information

Email: phc@ahs.ca

Information for community physicians on COVID-19: www.ahs.ca/covidphc