

WA DOH Updated COVID-19 Isolation Guidance – K-12 School Talking Points

March 19, 2024

On March 18, 2024 the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) released new guidance on [What To Do When You Are Sick With COVID-19 or Another Respiratory Virus](#). While much of DOH's new guidance is similar to recent updates announced by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), DOH's new guidance offers firmer recommendations on how to handle returning to normal activities after infection than CDC, as well as more guidance on how to avoid infecting people that are at higher risk for severe illness.

One of the most significant guidance changes is how long someone should stay home and away from others after contracting COVID-19. While previous COVID-19 guidance recommended people isolate for at least 5 full days after symptoms appeared, the new guidance recommends that people who have COVID-19 or another respiratory virus may return to normal activities when both of the following have been true for at least 24 hours: their symptoms are getting better overall, and they have not had a fever (without having to use fever-reducing medication). When people return to normal activities, for 5 days, they should wear a mask and take additional precautions such as taking steps to improve air flow and filtration, practicing good hand hygiene, cleaning regularly, physically distancing, and testing if accessible when they will be around others indoors.

- The isolation recommendations in the [Guidance to Prevent and Respond to COVID-19 in K-12 Schools and Child Cares](#) are now out of date. The updated isolation recommendations in the new DOH [What To Do When You Are Sick With COVID-19 or Another Respiratory Virus](#) guidance applies to schools. This guidance does not apply to healthcare settings. People who are staying, working, or visiting in a healthcare setting, long-term care facility, or residential care setting should follow the guidance in [COVID-19 Infection Prevention in Health Care Settings](#).
- For K-12 schools, DOH has only changed the isolation recommendations and recommendation on what to do if someone was exposed to COVID-19; all other portions of the [Guidance to Prevent and Respond to COVID-19 in K-12 Schools and Child Cares](#) remain the same. Sections that contain out of date information related to isolation recommendations and what to do if someone was exposed to COVID-19 include:
 - Exclusion of Individuals with COVID-19 Symptoms (pg. 4)
 - Separation of Individuals with COVID-19 Symptoms within a Facility (K-12 schools only) (pg. 4)
 - Monitoring, Testing, and Masking after COVID-19 Exposure (pg. 5)
 - Responding to COVID-19 Cases (pg. 6)
- The guidance provides considerations for how people who have COVID-19 or who have been exposed to COVID-19 can avoid infecting people who are at high risk of getting very sick.
 - People with COVID-19 can protect people at high risk of getting very sick by staying away from them for 10 days after their illness begins or until they test negative for COVID-19 with an antigen test. If someone with COVID-19 needs to be around

someone at high risk of getting very sick during this time, the most protective step they can take is wearing a well-fitting mask when around the person at high risk of severe disease.

- If someone has been exposed to COVID-19, they should consider staying away from people at high risk of getting very sick for 5 days after being exposed, if possible. If someone who was exposed to COVID-19 must be around someone at high risk of getting very sick during those 5 days, they should consider wearing a mask when indoors with them and testing themselves for COVID-19 before being in contact with them.
- The [Guidance to Prevent and Respond to COVID-19 in K-12 Schools and Child Cares](#) has a banner to reflect that the isolation guidance is no longer consistent with DOH recommendations. Users may need to clear their browsing history or cache to see the banner on the guidance document.