What do I do if my employee tests positive for COVID-19?

Anytime someone tests positive for COVID-19, the Health Department gives them guidance and next steps, including asking them and their close contacts to stay home from work to recover and to protect others from getting sick. This situation can be stressful and overwhelming, and it is important that you support your employees as they take necessary steps to keep your workplace safe and healthy. The guidance outlined here is based on CDC’s Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to COVID-19. This guidance applies to most people, but more specific guidance may supersede this for employees from certain sectors, such as people who work in congregate living facilities, health care settings and critical infrastructure workers. This guidance may also not apply to people who are advised to stay in isolation longer by their health care provider, including people with weakened immune systems.

Be ready to work with the Health Department to gather important information.

The Health Department is notified whenever someone tests positive for COVID-19 in Vermont. If an employee tests positive and went to work during their infectious period (beginning two days before the start of symptoms or two days before a positive test result for people who did not have symptoms), the Health Department may call their place of work letting them know one of their employees tested positive. It might take up to two days for the employer to hear from the Health Department. If an employee notifies you that they tested positive before you hear from the Health Department, you do not need to notify the Health Department, but you should begin collecting this important information right away:

- the last day the employee worked, and
- a list of people who may have been in close contact (within six feet for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period) with the employee while at work.

The Health Department will contact the employer for the information above. The employer may notify people who were in close contact with the employee who tested positive. Employers may request that the Health Department call and provide education and resources related to COVID-19 including quarantine and testing guidance. People who are close contacts and are not fully vaccinated should get tested on day 7. Day 0 is the last day they were in contact with the employee who has COVID-19.

Support employees who are asked to stay home from work.

Share resources on stress and coping and programs and benefits available, and provide options for remote work if possible.

When can employees with COVID-19 return to work?

Employers should not require proof of a negative test for COVID-19 to return work. Studies show that someone may continue to test positive long after they have recovered and are no longer contagious. Once someone meets the criteria for ending isolation, there is no longer a risk of them spreading the virus to others.
To know when it is safe for an employee to return to work, use one of the following two strategies:

1. **For people who had symptoms,** employees can return to work when:
   - their fever has resolved for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, and other symptoms (like cough or shortness of breath) have improved, **and**
   - at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

2. **For people who do not have symptoms,** employees can return to work when 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 test. If they develop symptoms, then use the first strategy (symptom-based) outlined above.

The Health Department does not provide letters for employees who test positive, or their close contacts, to return to work or to be excused from work.

**When can people who were in close contact with someone with COVID-19 return to work?**

People who are not fully vaccinated and had close contact with someone with COVID-19 will be asked by the Health Department to stay home from work, or “quarantine,” for 14 days since the last day they were in contact with the person who tested positive.

People in quarantine can get tested on or after day 7 of their quarantine period if they have not had symptoms. The test must be for a current infection (like a PCR test), except it cannot be an antigen test (also known as a rapid test). If the test is negative and they still have not had symptoms, they may end quarantine early and go back to work. You must continue to monitor yourself for symptoms for the full 14 days. This option is not available to those returning to work in close congregate settings where there is a high risk of transmitting COVID-19 to vulnerable people, such as assisted living and detention facilities.

**Help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.**

You can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by following the [Universal Guidance](https://healthvermont.gov/business) and encouraging employees to:

- Stay home if sick.
- Wear a mask.
- Ensure 6-foot spaces and uncrowded places.
- Practice good hygiene.
- Think before you travel.
- Get vaccinated.

**Clean and disinfect the workplace.**

- If it has been less than 24 hours since the employee who tested positive has been in the space, clean and disinfect the space.
- If it has been more than 24 hours, cleaning the space is enough.
- If it has been more than 3 days, no additional cleaning (beyond regular cleaning) is needed.

In most cases, when appropriate steps are taken quickly, there is no need to shut down the workplace.

**Learn more at [healthvermont.gov/business](https://healthvermont.gov/business)**