What to do when your co-worker has COVID-19

This guidance is for general work sites. More specific guidance for certain sectors, such as congregate living facilities, health care facilities, and critical care infrastructure workers, supersedes this guidance.

Learning that a co-worker has tested positive for COVID-19 can be stressful, but there are actions you can take to stay safe.

How will I know if my co-worker tested positive?

Your co-worker may tell you directly, your employer may tell you, or you may receive notification from the Health Department if you had possible close contact with a co-worker who tested positive.

There may be misinformation circulating and concerns about getting COVID-19 among co-workers. Remember to treat your co-workers with respect and confidentiality.

Why might the Health Department notify me?

When a person tests positive for COVID-19, the Health Department contacts them to find out who they were in close contact with during their infectious period. The infectious period is when the person with COVID-19 is contagious. It starts two days before symptoms began and continues until they are recovered. For people who haven't had symptoms, the infectious period starts two days before they got tested. Close contact means being within 6 feet of each other for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.

When would I need to quarantine and stay home from work?

If you were not in close contact with someone with COVID-19 while they were infectious, you may go to work. You do not need to quarantine.

If you were in close contact with someone with COVID-19 while they were infectious and you are not fully vaccinated, you should quarantine for 14 days. Day 0 is the last day you had contact with that person. Follow the quarantine guidance on this page: www.healthvermont.gov/aboutclosecontact. There may be some exceptions on quarantine guidance based on your type of employment and staffing capacity.

The Health Department recommends getting tested as soon as day 2 and again at day 7. The test should be for a current infection (like a PCR test), except it should not be an antigen test (also known as a rapid test). If the test at day 2 is negative, continue to quarantine. If the test at day 7 is negative and you still do not have any symptoms, you can end quarantine and go back to work. You must continue to monitor yourself for symptoms for the full 14 days. If either test is positive, follow isolation guidance.

If you are fully vaccinated and a close contact, you do not need to quarantine unless you develop symptoms. Fully vaccinated means 14 days have passed since your final dose of vaccine. If you are fully vaccinated, consider getting tested 3-5 days after your exposure date (Day 0 is the date of your
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If you develop symptoms at any point, seek testing right away, and stay at home and away from others.

If you have recovered from COVID-19 within the past 3 months, do not have any new symptoms and were a close contact you do not need to quarantine or get tested. If you develop symptoms, stay home, away from others and contact your health care provider for guidance.

For both close contacts and people who tested positive: Employers should not require proof of a negative test for COVID-19 to return to work. 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.

What else should I know about COVID-19?

- COVID-19 spreads when a person infected with COVID-19 breathes out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus when they cough, sneeze, sing, talk, or breathe. People who are closer than 6 feet from the person with COVID-19 are most likely to get infected. You can get COVID-19 if these droplets or particles are breathed in, land on your eyes nose or mouth, or get on your hands, and then you touch your eyes, nose or mouth. People can spread the virus that causes COVID-19 up to two days before they have symptoms. However, some people with COVID-19 do not have any symptoms.

- Vaccines are the best way to protect yourself and others against COVID-19. When you are vaccinated you are much less likely to get sick and less likely to transmit the virus to others. Find a vaccine site near you at healthvermont.gov/MyVaccine.

- Everyone can take prevention steps to protect themselves and others, like washing hands, staying home when sick and wearing a mask in indoor public settings. Learn more at healthvermont.gov/StaySafeVT. Diseases can make anyone sick regardless of their race or ethnicity. Fear and anxiety about COVID-19 can cause people to avoid or reject others even though they are not at risk for spreading the virus.

- Stay home from work if you develop a fever of over 100.4 °F, 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, or diarrhea.

- Seek testing right away if you experience symptoms, even if the symptoms are mild. Find a testing site near you at www.healthvermont.gov/testing.

- Avoid sharing items or workspaces with others and thoroughly clean workspaces prior to working and after you are done for the day.

- People who test positive should not return to work until they have recovered.

- Someone who has completed quarantine or has been released from isolation does not pose a risk of infection to other people.

- Clean and disinfect areas that were used within the last 24 hours by someone who tested positive for COVID-19. If it has been more than 24 hours, cleaning is enough. If it has been more than 3 days since the positive person was in the area, no additional cleaning (beyond regular cleaning) is needed.

Where can I find more information and support?
• Vermont’s COVID-19 Website
• Coping with Stress for Workers (CDC)
• COVID-19 information for your community, work and school (CDC)

If you have questions, please contact the Health Department at 802-863-7240.