

Answering Your COVID-19 Questions

If you've been exposed to someone who has COVID-19, or you start to develop symptoms, it can be a bit confusing as to what you're supposed to do next. You may have heard terms like "quarantine" and "isolation," but what do they really mean?

Quarantine vs. Isolation

The CDC describes quarantine as a strategy used to prevent transmission of the virus by keeping anyone who has been in close contact with an infected person apart from others. "Close contact" is defined as less than six feet away from the infected person for a cumulative 15 minutes (or more) over a 24-hour period.

"If you find yourself in a situation where you were exposed and in close contact with someone with COVID-19, you should stay at home, stay away from others, and wear a well-fitting mask when you're around others during your quarantine time," states Jen White, Registered Nurse and Quality Manager at Stoughton Hospital.

Should someone develop COVID-19 symptoms or test positive, that's when isolation comes into the picture. If possible, the infected person should stay in a specific "sick room" or area of the home that's separate from the rest of the household members. Ideally, they would have their own bathroom as well.

"I know that's really difficult in a lot of people's living situations," notes White. "So, if you have to use a shared living space, make sure everybody in the household is wearing a mask and you're using really good cleaning techniques, which you can find on the CDC website."

Isolation Timelines

Isolation should last a full five days, which is a shorter timeframe than previously recommended by the CDC. After the five days, if individuals are free of a fever, they should continue to wear a mask around others—whether at home or when out in public. Avoid travel for a full 10 days after the first day symptoms appeared. Those who are asymptomatic and test positive should follow a similar protocol, as they are still able to transmit the virus.

After exposure, if symptoms do not develop, people should get tested at least five days after the close-contact encounter. If the test is negative, quarantine can cease—but individuals should continue to wear a mask up to 10 days after the close contact. If you test positive, follow the isolation recommendations.

Some people are not able to get tested. In that case, those individuals can stop their quarantine after day five if they are symptom-free throughout the first five days but should continue to wear a mask up to 10 days.

Stopping the Spread

White's ultimate advice is to turn to trusted resources, like the CDC, and adhere to the testing, quarantine, and isolation recommendations.

“I know it's really difficult to stay in quarantine and isolation. Humans are social people, by nature. So, isolating is very difficult. But we need to in order to stop the spread, especially with this new variant that is spreading very quickly. We really need to do our part to keep everybody safe and follow those quarantine and isolation guidelines.”



***To listen to an in-depth conversation on this topic with Jen White, Registered Nurse and Quality Manager at Stoughton Hospital, please follow this link: <https://radiomd.com/stoughton/item/46389>*