I Tested Positive for COVID-19, What Now?

This guidance document will continue to be updated as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Visit www.coronavirusnetwork.org for the latest information, updates and resources.

Should I go to the hospital or emergency room after I get a positive result?

A positive result does not mean you have to immediately go to a hospital. Most people with COVID-19 only get mild symptoms, such as a fever and a cough, and can recover at home. If you are looking to get advice from a medical professional, you can seek a telemedicine appointment over the phone or online. If you develop severe symptoms, you should seek emergency medical care immediately. Severe symptoms you should look out for include the following:

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Waking up at night with shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New or sudden confusion
- Bluish lips and face

Please know that is not a complete list of severe symptoms. If you have other symptoms that seem severe to you, do not hesitate to call your doctor or health care provider.

How long can I expect to be sick?

People with mild cases of COVID-19 can expect to be sick for 7-10 days. By the end of the tenth day after you began to feel sick, your symptoms should have gone away. People who develop more severe cases of COVID-19 can be sick for two weeks or longer.

I do not have any symptoms. How could I have tested positive for COVID-19?

It is possible to have COVID-19 without showing any symptoms. In other words, you can have an active infection of coronavirus without feeling sick. Importantly, you can spread the coronavirus without feeling sick. Most people with COVID-19 do not have any symptoms for the first two days of their infection, but end up showing symptoms later. Some people never experience any symptoms at all. These are 'asymptomatic' cases of COVID-19. Because it is possible to spread the coronavirus without showing symptoms, it is important to isolate yourself if you test positive for COVID-19.
What can I do to help my recovery?

Although there is no cure or treatment for COVID-19, if you have a mild case of COVID-19 there are a number of things you should do to help your body fight off the coronavirus. You should stay hydrated and drink plenty of fluids, like water as well as get plenty of sleep and rest. It is also okay to take either acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil, etc,) to reduce your fever and treat other symptoms unless recommended otherwise by your healthcare provider. You should also be on the look out for the development of severe symptoms, such as trouble breathing or shortness of breath. Take your temperature at least twice per day to see if your illness is getting worse or better over time.

Should I tell everyone I came into contact with recently that I have COVID-19?

It is important to know who can be considered a ‘contact.’ A ‘contact’ is someone you interact with while you have an active infection of the coronavirus. People who get the coronavirus typically have an active infection (are contagious) beginning two days before they first notice any symptoms and while they feel sick showing symptoms. Therefore, someone you interacted with 3 days or longer before you began to notice symptoms likely would not have gotten the coronavirus from you because you most likely did not have an active infection at the time of your interaction. If you do interact with someone while you have an active infection, they can be considered a ‘contact’ if they:

- Had direct physical contact with you (touching, kissing, shaking hands, etc.)
- Had close contact with you, meaning they were less than 6 feet away from you for more than 10-15 minutes
- Had proximate contact with you, meaning they were farther than 6 feet away from you but you shared a space with them for an hour or longer.

The people who are most likely to be ‘contacts’ are the people who live with you. It is recommended that you tell the people you live with that you test positive. This will help to make sure everyone is prepared to reduce the risk of the virus’ spread within the home and beyond.

As private information, you do not have to tell anyone yourself that you tested positive if you do not want to. That being said, letting people know that they have been exposed to the coronavirus is an important part of stopping the spread of the coronavirus. If you have tested positive, it is likely that you will receive a call from your local or state department of health as a part of their ‘contact tracing’ program. They will confirm your positive test with you and ask you to provide information so they can reach the people who you have come into contact with while you have had an active infection. This way, you do not have to reach out to your ‘contacts’ personally. When speaking with contact tracers, you can rest assured that your information, and
the information you provide about your contacts, will be treated as confidential, will not be shared, and will not be linked to your name.

I do not feel sick, can I go outside to go for a walk, run errands, or go to work?

No. Once you test positive you need to stay isolated at home and avoid contact with others. Even if you do not feel sick and are showing little to no symptoms, you can still spread the coronavirus to others. Even if you have no symptoms at all, COVID-19 is a very contagious illness. If you test positive for COVID-19, you must stay isolated at home to protect others.

Instead of going out, get support from others to isolate at home. If you need groceries, medication and other supplies, call a friend or family member to drop off what you need. There are also many delivery services you can use. If you are concerned about losing your job or income because you must stay home to isolate, talk to your employer about working from home, if possible, or using sick days you have accrued. In addition, getting a doctor’s note can help. You should only leave your home when seeking medical care. In the event that leaving your home is unavoidable such as needing to get medical care or help a family member get medical care, wear a mask at all times.

How long do I have to be in isolation for?

The simple answer is that you must be isolated for as long as you are infectious, or are able to spread the coronavirus to others. For people with mild cases of COVID-19, you can stop isolating yourself when you meet ALL of these following conditions:

- Over 72 hours (three days), you have had no fever without using fever-reducing medications
- AND you have no problems breathing and are no longer coughing
- AND it has been at least 10 days since your symptoms first appeared

If you tested positive but are showing no symptoms of COVID-19, you should isolate for at least 10 days. By this time, the infection should have run its course and you should no longer be able to spread the coronavirus to others.

I live with other people, so how can I isolate myself?

If you have tested positive with COVID-19 and you live with roommates or family, you can isolate yourself and protect those you live with by doing the following:

- Confine yourself to a bedroom and a bathroom that are all your own and that you do not share with others
• When in a shared space or room used by other people or pets (whether or not they are currently there) wear a face mask that covers your nose and mouth
• When in the same space or room as other people or pets, make sure that you are at least 6 feet away from them. In confined spaces, such as hallways, this means that only one person should pass through at a time.
• People who are vulnerable to having severe cases of COVID-19 should not care for you or come in close proximity to you. Vulnerable people include those who are 65 years or older, those who are pregnant, and those with chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.
• There should only be one designated caregiver. Again, the caregiver should not be someone who is vulnerable to, or at severe risk of, having a severe case of COVID-19.
• Cover all of your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Make sure you throw away the tissue immediately and wash your hands with soap and water
• Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, especially before entering spaces that you share with others, such as the kitchen.
• Do not share personal items with others, such as drinking glasses, sheets, towels, eating utensils, home computers, or bedding. After using such items, make sure they are all thoroughly washed with soap and water.
• Ask the people you live with to frequently disinfect ‘high-touch’ surfaces, such as door knobs, light switches, table tops, and counters.

I share a bedroom and bathroom, so how can I isolate myself in this situation?

If you have tested positive for COVID-19 and you are not able to have your own bedroom or bathroom, you can protect the people you live with by doing everything mentioned in the previous answer in addition to the following:

• As best as possible, try to ventilate shared spaces, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, by opening a window or turning on a fan. Airflow may help reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus.
• People who are vulnerable to having severe cases of COVID-19 should not care for you or come in close proximity to you. Vulnerable people include those who are 65 years, those who are pregnant, or older and those with chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.
• Ask the people you live with to frequently disinfect ‘high-touch’ surfaces, such as door knobs, light switches, table tops, and counters. Special attention should be paid to surfaces and objects within spaces, such as bedrooms and bathrooms, that are frequently shared.
• Bathroom sinks are particularly believed to be sources of infection. They should be cleaned frequently and people should not place their toothbrushes on the counter around the sink.
When will I no longer be able to spread the coronavirus to others?

If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you will be able to spread the coronavirus over the course of your illness. Given that most mild cases of COVID-19 last about 7-10 days, you can expect to be infectious for about that length of time. It is important to know that most people with the coronavirus are able to spread it for up to two days before they start to feel sick, or notice their symptoms. Again, you will no longer be able to spread the coronavirus to others when you meet ALL of the following conditions needed to leave isolation:

- Over 72 hours (three days), you have had no fever without using fever-reducing medications
- AND you have no problems breathing and are no longer coughing
- AND it has been at least 10 days since your symptoms first appeared

Once I recover, can I get COVID-19 again?

After successfully fighting off an infection from a virus, our body naturally produces ‘antibodies’ that help stop you from getting the virus again. Many people who recover from COVID-19 develop specific antibodies that target the coronavirus. Currently, it is believed that these antibodies do provide some protection from being infected again. It is also uncertain how well antibodies protect an individual and how long the antibodies last. Thus the answer to this questions is, until further notice: it is possible that individuals may get COVID-19 again. If you recover from COVID-19, you should continue taking all recommended precautions, such as wearing a mask in public, social distancing, and washing your hands frequently.

I tested positive on the antibody test. Does that mean I have COVID-19?

If you tested positive on the antibody test, this means that you had COVID-19 in the past but have since recovered. It DOES NOT mean you currently have COVID-19. Also, at this time, many antibody tests are unreliable. You should understand that there is always a possibility that your results may not be accurate.

Depending on the type of antibody test you receive, a positive result can indicate a current or past infection. It is important you know which type of antibody test you are receiving. At this time, many antibody tests are unreliable. You should understand that there is always a possibility that your results may not be accurate.

Information for this FAQ came from:

Johns Hopkins University:
https://www.coursera.org/programs/new-york-city-contact-tracing-rvykz
Harvard Medical School:
https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/treatments-for-covid-19

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

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Please note that the guidance in this document does not substitute for the recommendations of your healthcare provider.