COVID-19 and Patient Care - Frequently Asked Questions for Healthcare Providers

January 7, 2021

How should individuals be assessed for exposure to COVID-19?

An individual is considered a close contact to someone with COVID-19 if:

- The exposure was within 6 feet for at least 15 minutes AND
- The exposure occurred while the COVID-19 positive person was infectious.

COVID-19 positive persons are considered infectious from 48 hours before symptom onset until at least 10 days after symptom onset, or if asymptomatic, from 48 hours prior to testing positive until at least 10 days from the test date.

Close contact may also apply if an individual has been:

- Providing care at home to someone with COVID-19
- Having direct physical contact with someone with COVID-19 (e.g. being coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).

In a community setting, when assessing an exposure, the determination of close contact should be made irrespective of whether the person with COVID-19 or the potential close contact was wearing a mask or other personal protective equipment (PPE).

An individual determined to be a close contact to a person with COVID-19 should be instructed to quarantine according to DPH guidance.
https://dph.georgia.gov/contact,
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/public-health-recommendations.html

What are the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection?

The incubation period for COVID-19, which is the period of time from exposure to onset of symptoms, ranges from 2 to 14 days, with a median time of 4-5 days from exposure to symptom onset. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Fever or 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
- Diarrhea

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While many of the symptoms of COVID-19 are common to other respiratory or viral illnesses, anosmia (loss of smell) appears to be more specific to COVID-19 (https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-guidance-healthcare-professionals, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-guidance-management-patients.html).

Signs and symptoms of COVID-19 in children are typically milder than in adults and can vary by age of the child. However, a multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) has been characterized in children with current or recent COVID-19 infection. This illness characterized by persistent fever, elevated inflammatory markers, and a constellation of symptoms including hypotension and, multi-organ (e.g. cardiac, gastrointestinal, renal, hematologic, dermatologic, and neurologic) involvement, typically requires inpatient evaluation and should be reported to DPH (https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/miscproviderjune19pdf/download).

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

Isolation guidelines apply to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 infection or has been told by a healthcare provider or public health official that COVID-19 infection is suspected. The duration of isolation is a minimum of 10 days from the date symptoms began or if asymptomatic, the date of positive test (https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact).

Quarantine guidelines apply to an individual who is determined to be a *close contact* of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. The duration of quarantine is 14 days from the last exposure to a COVID-19 positive person; however, individuals may be able to leave quarantine prior to 14 days if certain criteria are met (https://dph.georgia.gov/contact, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html).

What are the expectations for an individual in isolation or quarantine?

To minimize the risk of spread, individuals should wear a mask that covers the mouth and nose; maintain social distancing of at least six feet whenever possible; perform frequent and thorough handwashing; and avoid any unnecessary touching of the eyes, nose and mouth. For both isolation and quarantine, individuals are subject to the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) Administrative Order:

Individuals in isolation must follow home isolation instructions
- Stay home except to get medical care (i.e. for worsening symptoms such as difficulty breathing) or in the event of an emergency.
- Stay in a separate room from other people in the home if possible. Ideally a separate bedroom and bathroom should be used.
- Monitor for worsening of symptoms

Individuals in quarantine should closely monitor their health for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, stay home and avoid public settings, and plan to schedule testing.

To limit the spread of COVID-19, all individuals in isolation or quarantine should be encouraged to participate in contact tracing with DPH. If an individual has not been contacted by DPH, they can call 1-888-357-0169 (https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact, https://dph.georgia.gov/contact).

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When does the timeframe for isolation start?

If the individual is symptomatic, and COVID-19 infection is suspected or confirmed, isolation should begin at the time of symptom onset. If the individual is asymptomatic, isolation starts after a positive viral test (i.e. the day the test is collected, not the day the individual is notified of a positive test) (https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact).

When can isolation be discontinued?

Home isolation may be discontinued once certain criteria are met. If an individual is:

- Symptomatic with mild to moderate illness (not immunocompromised):
    - o Isolation ends after at least 10 days since symptoms first appeared, AND at least 24 hours have passed since last fever without use of fever reducing medications AND symptoms have improved.
    - o Example: If symptoms started on Aug 1, then isolation ends on Aug 11.
- Symptomatic with severe to critical illness (hospitalized) or is severely immunocompromised:
    - o Isolation ends after at least 20 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, AND at least 24 hours have passed since last fever without use of fever reducing medications AND symptoms have improved.
- Asymptomatic and not severely immunocompromised:
    - o Isolation ends after at least 10 days have passed since the positive laboratory test AND the person remains asymptomatic.
    - o Example: If the RT-PCR test was performed Aug 1, then isolation ends on Aug 11 if the individual has not developed symptoms.
- Asymptomatic and severely immunocompromised:
    - o Isolation ends after at least 20 days have passed since the positive laboratory test and the person remains asymptomatic.

https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact,

When does the timeframe for quarantine start?

The quarantine period starts on the day following the last possible exposure to COVID-19. If the individual has a second exposure to a COVID-19 positive person while in quarantine, then the quarantine period starts over.

- Example: Initial close contact is Aug 1, but the individual then has a second exposure on Aug 5, so quarantine would restart as of Aug 5

https://dph.georgia.gov/contact

When can quarantine be discontinued?

The recommended time period for quarantine is 14 days from the last close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. Individuals who do not live in congregate settings (e.g. long term care facilities, jails, prisons, shelters, etc.) may be able to leave quarantine prior to 14 days if certain criteria are met:

- Individuals may test out of quarantine any day after 7 full days have passed since the most recent exposure to someone with COVID-19 occurred, if they fulfill all THREE of the following criteria:

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1. Do not experience any symptoms during the monitoring period
2. Are tested for COVID-19
    a. The test should be a diagnostic test (PCR or antigen)
    b. It is preferred that the specimen is collected no more than 48 hours before the time of planned quarantine discontinuation, however, it should not be collected before day 5 of the quarantine period
3. Receive a negative result
    a. Quarantine cannot be discontinued until 7 full days since the most recent exposure, even if the individual receives the negative test result earlier
    b. If the result is positive, they must follow DPH isolation guidance

- If an individual is unable to be tested for COVID-19 during the quarantine period, they may discontinue quarantine any day after day 10 if they do not experience any symptoms during the monitoring period
- If quarantine is discontinued prior to 14 days, individuals should continue to monitor for symptoms, follow mitigation strategies (e.g. correct and consistent mask use, social distancing, hand and cough hygiene, environmental cleaning and disinfection, avoiding crowds, and ensuring adequate indoor ventilation) until 14 days after the most recent exposure, and isolate immediately if symptoms develop.

https://dph.georgia.gov/contact, https://dph.georgia.gov/dph-guidance, https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/return-school-guidance/download

When should an individual in quarantine be tested?

The test should be performed after the 5th day of quarantine, and it must be a PCR/molecular or antigen test. If an individual is tested more than 48 hours prior to release from quarantine, they must be retested after the 5th day OR follow the 10-day guidance. However, if the individual becomes symptomatic, then they should be tested sooner (https://dph.georgia.gov/contact).

What should an individual do while awaiting COVID-19 test results?

After COVID-19 testing, an individual who has had exposure to someone with COVID-19 and is in quarantine should remain home until 14 days have elapsed or they fulfill the criteria to leave quarantine earlier. An individual who is ill with COVID-19 symptoms and/or is suspected to have the disease should isolate until results are available and further consultation with a healthcare provider has taken place (https://dph.georgia.gov/covidtesting).

When is an individual cleared to resume normal day-to-day activities following a COVID-19 positive result?

An individual is cleared to resume normal day-to-day activities once home isolation has been completed. If any COVID symptoms return or worsen following isolation, then reassessment by a healthcare professional is recommended (https://dph.georgia.gov/isolation-contact).

What are the different COVID-19 tests?

There are currently 2 types of **diagnostic tests**:
- Molecular or RT-PCR (reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction) is collected via nasal swab, nasopharyngeal swab, and throat swab or saliva specimen.

- o Tests for current infection.
- o Positive result can be utilized for diagnostic purposes.
- Antigen tests (i.e. rapid antigen tests or point-of-care tests) are also collected with a swab like a PCR test.
  - o Tests for current infection
  - o Ideally reserved for symptomatic persons
  - o Both negative and positive results should be interpreted with caution as additional confirmatory testing via RT-PCR may be required depending on factors such as pre-test probability, symptoms, exposures, etc.
    - ▪ Additional discussion of this topic is found here: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/resources/antigen-tests-guidelines.html.

Antibody (serology) tests
- Test for IgM and IgG antibodies in the blood; results may suggest that an individual has or had an infection.
- Not recommended for diagnostic purposes.

https://dph.georgia.gov/how-covid-19-testing-georgia-works

Is there data available for specificity, sensitivity or other statistical measures of the COVID-19 tests?

Currently, there is not an FDA approved COVID-19 test. Therefore, limited information on diagnostic efficacy as measured by sensitivity and specificity is available. Use of the current PCR and serologic tests have been authorized by Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) only, which means the FDA has not thoroughly vetted these tests to grant full approval.

- A list of different approved tests under the FDA EUA by manufacturer are listed here: https://csb.mgh.harvard.edu/covid
- Additional information by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) discussing COVID-19 testing and resources can be found here: https://www.aafp.org/patient-care/emergency/2019-coronavirus/covid-19_resources/covid-19--testing.html.
- More information about the FDA EUA in the context of COVID-19 is discussed here https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/emergency-use-authorizations-medical-devices/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-emergency-use-authorizations-medical-devices
- To view the most current COVID-19 testing trends, Johns Hopkins provides reliable data on trends current COVID-19 testing https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing

What are the current recommendations for healthcare and non-healthcare personnel for returning to work?

DPH recommends a *time-based strategy* for returning to work, which is defined as completion of isolation or quarantine.

- Guidance for return to work for healthcare personnel
  - o CDC and DPH recommend that healthcare personnel not return to the workplace/healthcare setting until 14 days have passed since their exposure due to the extensive and close contact with patients required of these individuals

- o Even if healthcare personnel choose to follow the shortened duration of quarantine guidance, these recommendations pertain to daily activities outside of the workplace/healthcare setting only
  - o When staffing shortages are anticipated, contingency staffing strategies may be implemented. Additional guidance can be found here: https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/dph-return-work-guidance/download, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html
- Guidance for return to work, for non-healthcare personnel https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/dph-covid-19-return-work-guidance-after-covid-19-illness-or-exposure-persons-not/download, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/returning-to-work.html

Both CDC and DPH **DO NOT** recommend using a *test-based strategy* for individuals to return to work (i.e. 2 negative tests at least 24 hours apart) after COVID-19 infection for non-healthcare or healthcare personnel (https://dph.georgia.gov/dph-guidance).

What is the current guidance for back-to-school measures?

Parents should contact their local school and/or district for their specific plan and as applicable for questions regarding services such as; Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Speech, OT, Mental Health, etc. (https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-schools-childcare-facilities).

CDC also has general guidelines for the various return to school models i.e. in-person, hybrid, at-home or virtual (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/parent-checklist.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fschools-childcare%2Fchecklist.html).

Is COVID-19 testing indicated before visiting friends and family members?

In general, testing is not required when visiting friends and family. As individuals age their risk for COVID-19 infection goes up. Individuals with underlying medical conditions are also at greater risk of severe illness with COVID-19. These factors should be taken into consideration when visiting friends and family members and preventive measures should be taken. To minimize the risk of spread, individuals should wear a mask that covers the mouth and nose; maintain social distancing of at least six feet whenever possible; perform frequent and thorough handwashing; and avoid any unnecessary touching of the eyes, nose and mouth. Additionally, if the family member lives in a senior living community or equivalent, call ahead and/or refer to the facility website for visitor restrictions (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html).

What is the current guidance for travelers?

If travel is necessary, CDC provides travel tips on the following topics: types of travel (domestic and international), before travel, and during travel (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Ftravelers%2Ftravel-in-the-us.html).

Where can additional GA DPH guidance documents on COVID-19 be found?

Additional DPH guidance on a variety of topics (e.g. bars, restaurants, churches, employers, farmworkers, etc.) along with guidance available in Spanish can be found here: https://dph.georgia.gov/dph-guidance

Where can information on Georgia's COVID-19 Vaccine Plan be found?

Information on COVID-19 vaccination in Georgia can be found here: https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine. Providers who are interested in administering the vaccine can find additional information here: https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine-information-providers

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