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

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 a call 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 call 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 (beginning two days before the start of symptoms or two days before a positive test result for people who did not have symptoms). Close contact means being within 6 feet of each other for at least 15 minutes. The Health Department will follow up with each close contact to assess their risk for COVID-19 and provide information about staying home and the importance of getting tested.

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

If you **were** in close contact with someone with COVID-19 while they were infectious, you should quarantine for 14 days. Day 0 is the last day you had contact with that person. There may be some exceptions on quarantine guidance based on your type of employment and staffing capacity. The Health Department will provide you with specific guidance and next steps to take.

You can contact your health care provider about getting tested on or after day 7 of quarantine, if you have had no symptoms. This option is not available to those who 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. If your test is negative, you may end quarantine early and go back to work.

For both close contacts and people who tested positive: Neither a negative test for COVID-19 nor a letter from the Health Department should be required from your employer to return to work. The Health Department does not provide letters indicating that you can return to work.

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

What else should I know about COVID-19?

- 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.

- 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.

- COVID-19 is thought to spread through close contact from person-to-person, through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a mask when around others outside of your home.

- Stay home from work if you develop a fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion, runny nose, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Contact your health care provider for testing.

- Clean your hands often, either with soap and water for 20 seconds or a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

- 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 completed home isolation.

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

- Areas that were used by someone who tested positive for COVID-19 can be used by other people once the areas have been cleaned and disinfected. If it has been seven days since the person was in the area, additional cleaning beyond routine cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.

Where can I find more information and support?

- Vermont's COVID-19 Website

- COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

- How to Cope with Job Stress and Build Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Communities, Schools, Workplaces, and Events

- What to do if you are a close contact of someone who is diagnosed with COVID-19

- Coping With Stress

- How to Protect Yourself & Others

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 Interim 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 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 will 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 at least 15 minutes) with the employee while at work. The Health Department will contact each person who may have had close contact to assess their risk for COVID-19 and provide information about staying home and the importance of getting tested.

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 telework if possible.

When can employees with COVID-19 return to work?

To know when it is safe for an employee to return to work, refer to the following two strategies:

1. For people who have symptoms, use the **symptom-based strategy**. Exclude from work until:
   - At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery. Recovery is when fever resolves without the use of fever-reducing medications and respiratory 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, use the **time-based strategy**. Exclude from work until 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 test if they have not developed symptoms. If they develop symptoms, then use the **symptom-based strategy** outlined above.

Neither a negative test for COVID-19 nor a letter from the Department of Health should be required to return to work.

When can close contacts to someone with COVID-19 return to work?

People who had close contact with someone with COVID-19 will be asked by the Health Department to stay home from work for 14 days since the last day they were in contact with the person who tested positive. People in quarantine can contact their primary care provider about getting tested on or after day 7 of their quarantine period if they have had no symptoms. This option is not available to those who 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. If the test is negative, they may end quarantine early and go back to work.

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

You can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by:

- Maintaining confidentiality of the individual who tested positive, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Encouraging employees who come into contact with patrons or other employees to wear masks. For more information about mask use, see [Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#).
- Sharing resources on [prevention and staying safe](#).
- Asking employees to watch for symptoms and stay home if they experience any, including: fever of over 100.4°F, cough, shortness of breath, 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.

Clean and disinfect the workplace.

If it has been less than seven days since the employee who tested positive has been in the workplace, clean and disinfect areas that were used by the employee for a long period of time. Find more information about cleaning [here](#). **In most cases, when appropriate steps are taken quickly, there is no need to shut down the workplace.**

Additional Resources

- [General Business Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to COVID-19 (CDC)](#)
- [Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities (CDC)](#)
- [Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 (CDC)](#)