

MEMO

Date: October 26, 2022
To: **Health Service Delivery Organizations;
All Health-Care Workers**
From:
Re: **Updated Return to Work Guidance**

Effective the week of **October 31, 2022**, (implementation date may vary by service delivery organization) updated return to work guidance will take effect for all health-care workers.

These changes are primarily motivated by widespread staffing challenges being experienced across the health system as well as the risk that staff illness may pose to the continued delivery of vital health services. This approach aligns health system return to work guidance with public health guidance while maintaining additional preventative measures such as personal protective equipment for staff and medical grade masks for visitors.

Widespread community exposure during the recent Omicron waves combined with vaccination is resulting in significant immunity in the population, with very low reported incidence of repeat COVID-19 infection in non-immunocompromised individuals with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 120 days (4) months. The Omicron variant is also demonstrating milder infection in most patients than previous variants, though some patients may experience more severe disease.

The changes balance the need to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission in health settings with the need to maintain staffing for vital health services, particularly during the upcoming respiratory virus season.

Please note the following guidance related to COVID-19 testing and return to work:

When to Test for COVID-19

New symptoms consistent with COVID-19 in health-care workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 in last 120 Days (4 months)

Health-care workers who have had a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 120 days (4 months) and who develop symptoms are not required to test for COVID-19.

New symptoms consistent with COVID-19 in health-care workers who have not tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 120 Days

Health-care workers who have not had a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 120 days (4 months) and who develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19 must perform a rapid antigen test.

Household Contact/Exposure – When to Test/When to Return

Health-care workers who live with a household contact who has tested positive for COVID-19 can work if they remain asymptomatic.

If symptoms develop, staff members who have had a confirmed positive test for COVID-19 in the last 120 days (4 months) are not required to test.

Immunocompromised health-care workers and those who have NOT had a confirmed positive case of COVID-19 in the last 4 months, should test for COVID-19 and follow return to work guidance based on their result.

If a health-care worker is required to test because of symptoms, a single negative is sufficient to rule out COVID-19 in individuals whose symptoms are improving. If symptoms are unchanged or worsening 48 hours after the negative test, a repeat rapid antigen test should be performed., health-care workers should repeat test and follow guidance according to result.

When to Return to Work

New Positive COVID-19 Test

Health-care workers who perform a rapid antigen tests according to the most recent criteria and receive a **POSITIVE COVID-19 test result** may return to work on day five (5), provided that all of the following are true:

- **Symptoms are mild and improving** - Health-care workers must feel well enough for work, declare themselves “fit for work”; and
- Any lingering symptoms will not interfere with their ability **to maintain PPE standards;**
and
- **No fever** has been present for 24 hours without use of fever reducing medication

NOTE: Day 0 is either the day of symptom onset/ positive test.

Immunocompromised and Positive Test

There is no change to return to work guidance for immunocompromised health-care workers who test positive for COVID-19. If test is positive, immunocompromised health-care workers should remain off for 10 days from the start of illness AND be able to declare themselves “fit for work” before returning.

NOTE: In all circumstances, a negative test result is no longer a requirement for returning to work.

Health-care workers are reminded of the importance of ongoing preventative measures remain in place and required across the health system, including:

- Requirement to self-screen for symptoms and declare as “fit for work” before each shift;
- Requirement of all health-care workers to wear PPE consistently;
- Importance of ongoing meticulous hand hygiene and adherence to physical distancing wherever possible when their mask/respirator is removed (to eat or drink or during breaks).



Updated Return to Work Quick Reference Guide available here:
<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/files/covid-19-return-to-work-qrg.pdf>.

Updated Return to Work Frequently Asked Questions available here:
<https://sharedhealthmb.ca/wp-content/uploads/covid-19-staff-return-to-work-faq.pdf>