I Have COVID-19: Now What

A very simplified approach to the changes in Covid testing and Isolation period...

You've worn masks. You've avoided dangerous scenarios, such as large gatherings or needless travel. You've gotten vaccinated and boosted. Now, despite everything, you have COVID-19. What's next?

First, don't be too hard on yourself. Infection may happen at some point, regardless of what precautions we take, especially with the extremely transmissible nature of the Omicron variant. If you're dealing with a positive test, stay calm and focus on your next steps.

I Tested Positive for COVID-19: What Comes Next?

When pondering what to do if you have COVID-19, you'll likely have a lot of questions.

What If You Took an At-Home COVID-19 Test?

If you tested positive with an at-home COVID-19 test, you might be wondering if you need COVID-19 PCR testing to confirm your results. **The answer is no.** According to the CDC, a positive self-test result means that the test detected the virus, and you are very likely to have an infection.

If you suspect you have the virus and haven't yet been tested,, confirming with a home test is enough. If you're positive, it's important to begin isolating immediately. Avoid going to a medical facility to get tested. Not only does this waste valuable medical resources if you do not need immediate medical care, but it can also further the spread.

Instead, trust in your home test, and focus on the next steps. How long do you have to quarantine? What should you do if you start feeling worse while isolating at home?

Do You Need to Report a Positive Test?

Reporting your positive test can help experts keep track of the spread of the virus. Most home testing options include information on how to report a positive test. If you can't find this information, don't worry. You can call your local health department and say, "I tested positive for COVID-19." This will make sure officials include your case in the tallies.

How Can You Keep Everyone Safe?

It's best to stay completely alone, but that can be hard if you live with others. If that's the case for you, choose one room in the house to isolate in. Use a separate bathroom if possible. If there's no choice but to be around others, wear a well-fitted mask. Use an N95 mask when you can.

It's also wise to reach out to anyone you've been in recent contact with. You can spread the virus up to 48 hours before symptoms begin, so keep that time frame in mind.

How Long Do You Have to Quarantine?

Remember when the guidance for what to do if you have COVID-19 included 10 days of isolation? **That's recently changed.**

So, how long do you have to quarantine now? The CDC recommends isolating for **at least five days** after a positive test. After that point, **you can stop as long as you no longer have symptoms.** For those who tested positive and experienced symptoms, it is advised that the person must remain "fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication" and other symptoms should have improved before they end their isolation, which must last a **minimum of five days**. Be sure to continue to mask around others for at least five days after you leave isolation.

Do You Need a Negative Test to End Your Quarantine?

You don't need a test to get you out of isolation provided you're not having any symptoms, but it is best practice. If you choose to get tested at the end of your quarantine, do so at the end of the first five days. If you're still positive, you can continue isolating another five days to be extra cautious. However, keep in mind it's possible to test positive for up to 12 weeks after infection. You aren't necessarily contagious during that time.

What If You Test Negative Before the Five Days Is Up?

Let's say you decide to take another COVID-19 test during the initial five-day isolation period. It comes up negative. Can you stop isolating?

The current CDC guidelines don't say anything about getting out of isolation early with a negative test. It's also unlikely that you'd test positive and then negative only a few days later. The CDC says people with symptomatic and asymptomatic cases should isolate for **at least five days.** If you're dealing with severe COVID-19 symptoms, you should isolate for at least 10 days.

At What Point Should You Seek Medical Attention?

Part of understanding what to do if you have COVID-19 is knowing when to seek help. The over-capacity challenges hospitals are facing is a real issue. No one wants to add to the problem or risk spreading the virus. You also don't want to miss out on crucial medical care.

While isolating, keep a close eye on your condition. Watch for the following signs of an emergency situation:
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain or pressure
- Confused mental state
- Trouble staying awake or waking up
- Pale, blue, or gray skin, nails, or lips
- Any other severe symptoms you feel concerned about

If you experience any of the above, dial emergency services or plan to visit a local emergency room. Notify the 911 operator of your COVID-19 status. If traveling to the hospital yourself, call ahead to let them know a COVID-19 patient is on the way. This will help the staff prepare for your arrival.