

Has the COVID-19 14-Day Quarantine Period Been Shortened?

By Patricia Anderson Pryor

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By now, employers likely have heard the news that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reduced the length of time that individuals should quarantine after an exposure to COVID-19. The old adage “Don’t believe everything you read” turns out to be true in this case. Although the CDC has stated that shortened quarantine periods may be an option in certain circumstances, the agency continues to recommend quarantining the full 14 days, absent local health authorities determining that a shorter period is appropriate.

The CDC’s [advice to individuals on how long they should quarantine](#) says:

Anyone who has had close contact with someone with COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days **after their last exposure** to that person.

- The best way to protect yourself and others is [to stay home for 14 days if you think you’ve been exposed](#) to someone who has COVID-19. Check [your local health department’s website](#) for information about options in your area to possibly shorten this quarantine period.

However, anyone who has had close contact with someone with COVID-19 and who meets the following criteria does **NOT** need to stay home.

- Has COVID-19 illness within the previous 3 months **and**
- Has recovered **and**
- Remains without COVID-19 symptoms (for example, cough, shortness of breath)

In its [FAQs for employers](#), the CDC still says: “Potentially exposed employees who **do not have** symptoms should remain at home or in a comparable setting and practice social distancing for 14 days.” (Critical infrastructure workplaces should follow the [guidance specific for critical infrastructure workers](#).)

The CDC has published a [scientific brief outlining options](#) that local public health authorities can consider to reduce quarantine periods for individuals exposed to COVID-19. The CDC states, in part:

Local public health authorities determine and establish the quarantine options for their jurisdictions. CDC currently recommends a quarantine period of 14 days. However, based on local circumstances and resources, the following options to shorten quarantine are acceptable alternatives.

- Quarantine can end after Day 10 without testing and if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring.
 - With this strategy, residual post-quarantine transmission risk is estimated to be about 1% with an upper limit of about 10%.
- *When diagnostic testing resources are sufficient and available (see bullet 3, below)*, then quarantine can end after Day 7 if a diagnostic specimen tests negative and if no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring. The specimen may be collected and tested within 48 hours before the time of planned quarantine discontinuation (e.g., in anticipation of testing delays), but quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than after Day 7.
 - With this strategy, the residual post-quarantine transmission risk is estimated to be about 5% with an upper limit of about 12%.

Meet the Author



[Patricia Anderson Pryor](#)

Principal and Office Litigation
Manager
Cincinnati 513-322-5035
Email

In both cases, additional criteria (e.g., continued symptom monitoring and masking through Day 14) must be met.

What does all of this mean for employers? Tread lightly. The CDC's apparent softening on the length of quarantine may provide an opportunity for some employees to return to work more quickly, but employers should consider the realities and risks present in their workplaces and comply with the quarantine periods established by state and local public health authorities.

Jackson Lewis attorneys are closely monitoring updates and changes to legal requirements and guidance and are available to help employers weed through the complexities involved with state-specific or multistate-compliant plans.

If you have questions or need assistance, please reach out to the Jackson Lewis attorney with whom you regularly work, or any member of our COVID-19 team.

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