Return to Work After COVID Infection or Exposure

OSU Student Health Services clinical staff will not provide individual return to work notes for students who have been infected with or exposed to COVID-19. We feel it is up to the employer and employee to work out an agreement regarding the best time to return to work based on the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) below:

1. Otherwise, healthy individuals with a normal immune system, symptoms consistent with COVID-19 without a clear alternative cause, and/or a positive test should self-isolate* for 10 days starting on the day that symptoms begin. They can leave isolation when at least 10 days have passed, they are fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, and their symptoms have improved significantly.

2. Individuals with a compromised immune system or hospitalization related to a severe COVID-19 infection should follow the self-isolation guidelines above but should extend the period to 20 days.

3. Individuals who have a positive test and no symptoms should self-isolate for 10 days starting on the day the positive sample was collected. If the individual develops symptoms during that 10-day period, then the first day of self-isolation becomes the day of symptom onset and they should follow the guidelines in step 1.

4. Tests can remain positive for weeks or months after the infection has resolved, so retesting prior to return to work is not useful.

5. Unvaccinated people who have a significant exposure (six feet or closer to an infected individual for more than 15 minutes in a 24-hour period) to COVID-19 should quarantine** for 14 days from the time of exposure. A person can become infectious any time during those 14 days period regardless of whether they have had a negative test the day or week prior. You may be able to shorten your quarantine duration as local public health authorities make the final decisions about how long quarantine should last. For example: Benton County has recently shortened quarantine for OSU students. They may end quarantine on day 8 if they have no symptoms after exposure and have a negative antigen or PCR test done between 5 - 7 days after the last exposure. Please note: This may not apply to non-OSU students or OSU students who work or reside outside of Benton County. If you work or reside outside Benton County, you must consult the local health department for guidelines.

6. Fully vaccinated individuals do not need to quarantine after contact with someone who had COVID-19 unless they develop symptoms. However, fully vaccinated people should get tested 5 to 7 days after their exposure, even if they don’t have symptoms. They should also wear a mask indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until their test result is negative.
These periods of contagiousness (10 days) or potential contagiousness (14 days) after exposure have been carefully explored by public health entities, so employers and employees alike should feel comfortable safely returning to work if the guidelines are followed.

We still strongly recommend all individuals wear a mask, frequently wash their hands, and social distance in all individuals, including those who have recovered from an infection.

Oregon Health Authority General Guidance for Employer can be found here: https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/le2342C.pdf

*Self-isolation refers to a period of time where an individual infected with COVID-19 should avoid being around others because they are potentially contagious. This means staying at home in your own room, eating meals alone, and, if at all possible, using your own private bathroom. Individuals should only leave isolation to obtain urgent medical care.

**Quarantine refers to a period where an individual with a significant exposure to COVID-19 should avoid being around others because they could be developing an active infection during that period. This quarantine should be continued for the full 14 days despite any negative tests during that period. This means staying at home in your own room, eating meals alone, and, if at all possible, using your own private bathroom. Individuals should only leave quarantine to obtain urgent medical care.