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 symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and/or a positive test should self-isolate* for five days starting on the day that symptoms begin. If the individual does not have symptoms, then self-isolation starts on the date of the positive test. Day 0 is the first day of symptoms or a positive viral test. Day 1 is the first full day after symptoms developed or the test specimen was collected. They can leave isolation when at least five full 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. After five days of isolation, the individual should continue to always wear a mask around others for an additional five days to complete a full 10 days of infection precautions. They may leave isolation after five days but should still avoid travel and avoid being around people who are high-risk for the full 10 days.

2. Individuals with a compromised immune system or hospitalization related to a severe COVID-19 infection should follow self-isolation for a minimum of 10 days and up to 20 days. Their treating Physician will need to advise fitness to return to work.

3. Individuals who have a positive test and no symptoms should self-isolate and then mask as above in #1. If the individual develops symptoms during that 10-day period, they should restart isolation. In this case, the first day of self-isolation becomes the day of symptom onset and they should follow the guidelines in #1.

4. PCR tests can remain positive for weeks or months after the infection has resolved, so re-testing with PCR prior to return-to-work is generally not helpful and is not part of current CDC guidelines. Persons who wish to retest may use an antigen test after five days, but this will not shorten the need for masking for the full 10 days. If an antigen test is positive after five days, the infected person must remain in isolation for a full 10 days.

5. Exposed Persons: Persons who have a significant exposure (six feet or closer to an infected individual for a total of 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period) should wear a well-fitted mask for a full 10 days after the exposure and should get at test at day five after exposure. They should avoid elderly, immunocompromised, and other persons at high risk of complications from COVID-19 for the entire 10 days. If they develop Covid-19 symptoms at any time during the 10 days, they should immediately isolate and be re-tested.
These periods of contagiousness (five days) or potential contagiousness (10 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, including those who have recovered from an infection.

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

*Self-isolation refers to a period 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 possible, using your own private bathroom. Wear a well-fitted mask if you must be around others in your home. Individuals should only leave isolation to obtain urgent medical care.