Leaving Isolation or Returning to Work after Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19

Notes: These are general instructions from the San Francisco Department of Public Health, based on recommendations from the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

If you work in a healthcare organization or as a first responder (Fire, Police, Sheriff, EMS), please check with your organization, which may have a different policy for returning to work.

This document is for persons who have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 (see definitions below).

This document is NOT for persons in quarantine at home after being exposed to COVID-19, while they watch and wait to see if they develop symptoms of COVID-19. The period of quarantine is 14 days after an exposure.

Definitions

- **Confirmed COVID-19** means that you were tested for COVID-19 and you learned that the test result was positive for COVID-19.

- **Suspected COVID-19** means one of two things:
  - Your medical provider said you have COVID-19, based on your symptoms. You weren’t tested, or your test result was negative, but you were told to go into isolation because you probably have COVID-19;
  - OR-
  - You developed symptoms that could be COVID-19 – for example a “cold” (runny nose, sneezing, cough) or a flu-like illness (cough, fever, muscle aches) and stayed home; now you are wondering when you can leave isolation or go back to work.

**Q & A**

1) I have had suspected or confirmed COVID-19 illness and I have been in isolation. When can I leave isolation? When can I go back to work?

You can leave isolation and go back to work when all the following are true:

- You have had at least 3 days in a row with no fever at all; AND

- During those 3 days you have not taken any fever-reducing medication. Fever reducing medication = Tylenol, Acetaminophen, Advil, Ibuprofen, Aleve, or Naproxen; AND

- If you had cough or shortness of breath, it is getting better; AND

- It has been at least 7 days since your symptoms first started.
2) Do I need to be tested in order to leave isolation or go back to work?
   No, you can leave isolation or go back to work once everything in (1) above is true.

3) But isn’t there a way to get tested to see if I am okay to return to work?
   You don’t need to get tested if you follow all the rules in (1) above. If you work in a healthcare organization or as a first responder, check with your organization to see if they offer COVID-19 testing as part of their return-to-work plan.

4) Do I have to wear a face mask when I leave isolation or go back to work?
   If you are still coughing, you should wear a face mask covering your mouth and nose when you are around other people. (See extra steps below if you work in healthcare).

5) What if I work in healthcare? (see notes above, your organization may have a different policy)
   For healthcare workers, the CDC recommends you follow all the rules in (1) above, PLUS all the following extra steps to protect other people at work:
   • Wear an isolation mask at all times while working, until all symptoms are completely resolved or until 14 days after your illness started, whichever is longer.
   • Keep away from and have no contact with patients that have a weakened immune system, such as cancer or transplant patients, until 14 days after your illness started.
   • Be sure to wash your hands frequently.
   • Monitor your health, and if your symptoms come back or get worse, get checked by your employee health or healthcare provider right away.

6) What if I work as a San Francisco first responder (Fire, Police, Sheriff, EMS)?
   Please check your organization’s policies and procedures for returning to work after COVID-19.

Where can I go for more information?
This and other clinical guidance specific to San Francisco are posted online:
http://www.sfcdcp.org/covid19
CDC return to work guidance: