BOSTON PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSION

Building a Healthy Boston

BOSTON PUBLIC HEALTH COMMISSION | GUIDANCE

Public Health Advisory

Updated Isolation Guidance for COVID-19

Updated January 14, 2022

In early January, the CDC updated its guidance on voluntary COVID-19 isolation periods for the general public. The new guidance shortens the duration of time suggested for isolation (see CDC Updated Guidance for Isolation and Quarantine). Isolation is recommended when a person is sick or when they have been infected with the virus, even if they don't have symptoms. This change was prompted by (1) evidence that most COVID-19 transmission occurs early during infection[1]; (2) high case rates because of how easily the omicron variant is spread and the societal impact resulting from long isolation periods; (3) limited data suggesting that hospitalization and death rates resulting from infection with the omicron variant are lower than previous variants.[2]

The Boston Public Health Commission is adopting similar guidance and shortening the period of isolation for individuals infected with COVID-19. In addition to shortening the period of isolation, a negative viral test (rapid antigen testing) at Day 5 after symptoms begin or after a positive viral test has been added to the Commission's guidance as a requirement to end isolation. Given the high community transmission rate in the current surge in Boston this is a critical addition to the Commission's guidance.

In general, symptoms and duration of illness in COVID-19 infections among fully vaccinated individuals are reduced compared with those who are unvaccinated (CDC Science Brief: COVID-19 Vaccines and Vaccination). One study reported a lower duration of infection among vaccine recipients (5.5 days) compared with unvaccinated individuals (7.5 days).[3] Therefore, the Commission's guidance is different for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

ISOLATION GUIDANCE

Fully Vaccinated Individuals

[Received two doses of mRNA (Pfizer or Moderna) COVID-19 vaccine or single dose J&J vaccine irrespective of duration of time since completion of the vaccination series]

Duration: Self-isolation for COVID-19 positive cases is a minimum of **5 days** after first positive viral test, if asymptomatic and fully vaccinated.

Isolation can be discontinued after 5 days and once they have:

- Been without fever for 24 hours (without taking fever-reducing medications); and,
- Experienced improvement in other symptoms.
- A negative rapid antigen test taken on or after day 5
- Following the 5-day isolation period, individuals must consistently wear a well-fitting mask for 5 additional days when around others (until 10 days after the first positive test date).

If a rapid antigen test cannot be obtained due to limited access and availability, isolation can be discontinued at **7 days** without documentation of a negative rapid antigen test. If you are unable to wear a mask when around others, you should continue to isolate for a full 10 days.
To calculate the 5-day isolation period, day 0 is the first day of symptoms or the first day of a positive viral test. Day 1 is the next day after the symptoms began or the next full day after a positive viral test.

Unvaccinated Individuals

Duration: Self-isolation for COVID-19 positive cases is a minimum of **7 days** after first positive viral test, if asymptomatic.

Isolation can be discontinued after 7 days and once they have:

- Been without fever for 24 hours (without taking fever-reducing medications); and,
- Experienced improvement in other symptoms.
- A negative rapid antigen test taken on or after day 5
- Following the 7-day isolation period, individuals must consistently wear a well-fitting mask for 3 additional days when around others, until 10 days after the first positive test date.

If a rapid antigen test cannot be obtained due to limited access and availability, isolation can be discontinued at **10 days** without documentation of a negative rapid antigen test. If you are unable to wear a mask when around others, you should continue to isolate for a full 10 days.

To calculate the 7-day isolation period, day 0 is the first day of symptoms or the first day of a positive viral test. Day 1 is the next day after the symptoms began or the next full day after a positive viral test.

Guidance regarding quarantine is available here.

We *strongly recommend* that if you are unvaccinated or have not been boosted that you get vaccinated or boosted. **Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our communities.**

This guidance does not replace indoor masking requirements currently in place in Boston.

This guidance does not apply to health care workers. Separate guidance has been published.

The updated isolation guidance applies to teachers and staff in K-12 schools. Boston Public Schools current mask requirement remains in effect. Please see additional guidance here.

This guidance does not apply to individuals who are immunocompromised or severely ill (requiring hospitalization) with COVID-19. Individuals who are immunocompromised or those with serious COVID-19 illness or requiring hospitalization should wait until 20 days since first positive test and should consult with a provider. Guidance is available here.

Please note that BPHC will continue to evaluate these recommendations as more data become available.

References:

1. Meyerowitz EA, Richterman A, Gandhi RT, Sax PE. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2: a review of viral, host, and environmental factors. Ann Intern Med.external icon 2020 Sep 17: M20-5008.

2. Maslo C, Friedland R, Toubkin M, Laubscher A, Akaloo T, Kama B. Characteristics and outcomes of hospitalized patients in South Africa during the COVID-19 Omicron wave compared with previous waves. Published online December 30, 2021. doi:10.1001/jama.2021.24868

3. Kissler SM, Fauver JR, Mack C, Tai CG, Breban MI, Watkins AE, Samant RM, Anderson DJ, Metti J, Khullar G, Baits R. Viral Dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 Variants in Vaccinated and Unvaccinated Persons. New England Journal of Medicine. 2021 Dec 1.