



# Addressing COVID-19 Fear & Stigma

People infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 recover and get better. This is what you need to know in order to ensure that they are not subjected to persisting stigma or fears by others in the community or workplace:

## How long is someone who tests positive for COVID-19 infectious?

In Ontario, people who test positive are considered infectious for 10 days following the onset of their symptoms. The only exception is those who go on to develop severe illness requiring hospitalization OR who are severely immune compromised. These patients may take longer to clear the virus and are considered infectious for 20 days from symptom onset. But everyone else is considered no longer infectious after Day 10. The public health nurse managing the case will “discharge” the individual from self-isolation when he or she deems there is no longer an increased risk to others.

## Shouldn't we test to make sure they are clear?

No. Testing in Ontario is able to identify even very small fragments of dead virus that may still be found within the cells lining the respiratory tract. For this reason, post-infection testing is no longer being recommended but may be used at the discretion of the hospital to discontinue precautions for admitted patients.

## What if the person has finished their self-isolation and they are still sick?

As long as they have had no fever and their symptoms are improving for at least 24 hrs, they are considered to be cleared. Absence of a cough is not required for those who have a chronic cough or who are experiencing reactive airways post-infection.

## What if there were no symptoms?

People who were never symptomatic are considered to be infectious for 10 days after their positive test collection date.

## Are there any special measures a person who had COVID-19 should take?

No. Once a person has been completed their 10 days of self-isolation and has been cleared by public health, they should continue to practice all the public health measures recommended for everyone. This includes physical distancing from others outside their household members, staying home when sick, frequent handwashing and wearing a mask in all indoor and public settings.

## Why do high risk contacts have to self-isolate for 14 days, but those with COVID-19 only isolate for 10 days?

As shared above individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 are no longer infectious after 10 days. However, the incubation period of COVID-19 is 14 days, which means it may take up to 14 days after an exposure for someone to develop COVID symptoms.

## How is severe illness or severe immune compromise defined?

Severe illness is defined as requiring ICU level of care for COVID-19 illness.

Severe immune compromise can include cancer, chemotherapy, untreated HIV infection with CD4 T lymphocyte count <200, combined primary immunodeficiency disorder, taking prednisone >20 mg/day for more than 14 days and taking other immune suppressive medications.

Factors such as advanced age, diabetes, and end-stage renal disease are generally not considered severe immune compromise for the purpose of determining self-isolation period.

## How do I manage an individual who has recovered and cleared from a prior COVID-19 infection, but now has symptoms and tests positive again?

There is emerging evidence regarding the issue of prolonged viral shedding, as well as repeat positives after negative test results. At this time, there is no evidence of a case of true re-infection. Research conducted by the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(1) on 285 individuals with COVID-19 up to 37 days after discharge from isolation found no evidence of live virus. Viral cell culture testing of 108 repeat positive cases all had negative results despite the fact that almost half of the individuals still had symptoms. In addition, contact follow-up of 790 contacts exposed to the 285 repeat positive cases did not identify any instances of transmission. Cases that have been cleared should generally not be re-tested, as ongoing shedding of dead virus particles may occur.

## Is someone who has recovered from COVID considered immune?

Most studies show that people who have recovered from the novel coronavirus have antibodies to the virus. But it's unclear how long the protection from those antibodies lasts, and it is also still unknown whether people who are asymptomatic or have only very mild symptoms will develop immunity. We do not know the answer to this question yet.

For questions or more information, call **705-743-1000**  
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