

# 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 14 days following the onset of their symptoms. The only exception is those who go on to develop severe respiratory illness and need hospitalization. These patients may take longer to clear the virus. But everyone else should be considered no longer infectious by Day 14. 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 the 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 it has been 14 days and they are still sick?

As long as they have had no fever for at least 72 hours and their symptoms are improving, 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 14 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 14 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, staying home when sick, frequent handwashing and wearing a cloth mask with physical distancing is a challenge.

## 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](#)<sup>(1)</sup> 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.

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### **References**

<sup>1</sup>Korea Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Risk assessment and International cooperation. Findings from investigation and analysis of re-positive cases [press release] (2020 05 19) [cited 2020 06 03]. Available from: [www.cdc.go.kr/board/board.es?mid=a30402000000&bid=0030&act=view&list\\_no=367267&nPage=1](http://www.cdc.go.kr/board/board.es?mid=a30402000000&bid=0030&act=view&list_no=367267&nPage=1)

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). iPHIS quick reference guide: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) - updated as of May 29, 2020. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2020.

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