



Date: December 26, 2020

To: All Healthcare Settings including but not limited to Hospitals, End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) Facilities, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Home Care, Outpatient Clinics, Dentists, and Private Practices

Health Advisory: Revised Protocols for Personnel in Healthcare and Other Direct Care Settings to Return to Work Following COVID-19 Exposure

Please distribute immediately to:

Administrators, Infection Preventionists, Hospital Epidemiologists, Medical Directors, Nursing Directors, Risk Managers, and Public Affairs.

Summary

- This document provides updated guidance on healthcare personnel (HCP) returning to work after a COVID-19 exposure or travel outside of New York State or its contiguous states.
- The information contained herein supersedes any previous guidance related to HCP returning to work after COVID-19 exposure or travel.
- HCP at nursing homes or adult care facilities certified as Enhanced Assisted Living Residences (EALR) or licensed as Assisted Living Programs (ALP) should note additional requirements listed for them below.
- This guidance aligns with the [December 2, 2020 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) guidance](#).
- This guidance does not apply to HCP who are known or suspected of having COVID-19 who are in isolation; requirements for the discontinuation of isolation should be followed for these individuals.

Background

New York State is experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases and expects to see increasing case numbers and hospitalizations at least through mid-January. COVID-19 disease transmission will continue until the number of people vaccinated reaches critical mass, which is expected to occur sometime between June and September of 2021.

A surge in COVID-19 cases increases the possibility of exposures for health care personnel. This may affect staffing levels. However, concerns about staff shortages must be balanced against the risk of further exposures and outbreaks among hospital staff and possible transmission of COVID-19 to patients.

To ensure adequate and appropriate staffing in hospitals and direct care settings while minimizing risk of transmission, New York State is issuing these revised guidelines for return to work for healthcare personnel (HCP), whether direct care providers or other staff, who have been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19 and are asymptomatic.

Hospitals and direct care facilities contact Department's Hospital Capacity Command Center (HCCC) at 1-917-909-2676 anytime they are concerned about a staff shortage. The HCCC is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Guidelines

Given the current surge in COVID-19 cases, the following guidelines apply to HCP returning to work following a COVID-19 exposure:

- Asymptomatic HCP who have been in contact with (i.e. exposed to) a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 within the past 10 days may return to work after a 10 day quarantine without testing if no [symptoms](#) have been reported during the quarantine period, providing the following conditions are met:
 - HCP must continue daily symptom monitoring through Day 14;
 - HCP must be counseled to continue strict adherence to all recommended non-pharmaceutical interventions, including hand hygiene and the use of appropriate face coverings.
 - HCP must be advised that if any [symptoms](#) develop, they should immediately self-isolate and contact the local public health authority or their healthcare provider to report this change in clinical status and determine if they should seek testing.

The following guidelines apply to HCP returning from travel to a non-contiguous state or territory subject to a CDC Level 2 or higher COVID-19 risk assessment level or for which the COVID-19 risk level is designated by the CDC as unknown:

- HCP who travel outside of NYS beyond its contiguous states should adhere to the essential worker requirements pursuant to the Department's [November 3, 2020 travel guidance](#) when not at work and must seek diagnostic testing on Day 4.

HCPs at Nursing Homes and Adult Care Facilities Certified as EALRs or ALPs

Health care personnel working at nursing homes or adult care facilities certified as EALRs or ALPs who were exposed to COVID-19 may be released from quarantine in accordance with the guidance described above; however, they must remain furloughed from work for 14 days.

Health Care Personnel and COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave Law

HCP who are furloughed due to contact with a known positive case, or because they do not meet the above conditions for returning to work, may qualify for paid sick leave benefits, and their employers can provide them with a letter confirming this, which can be used to demonstrate eligibility for the benefit. However, New York employees will forgo their paid sick leave benefits from New York's COVID-19 paid sick leave law if they engage in travel not directed by their employer to a country designated as having a Level 2 or higher health notice by the CDC or states other than those contiguous to New York from the time of return to New York until the end of the required period of quarantine or isolation.

General questions or comments about this advisory can be sent to icp@health.ny.gov, covidhospitaldctinfo@health.ny.gov, or covidadultcareinfo@health.ny.gov.