NYSNA Demands Employers Comply With Expanded Isolation Protocols for Healthcare Workers

On February 4, 2022 the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) released an updated advisory on return-to-work protocols for healthcare personnel with SARS-CoV-2 infection or those who have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2. This new advisory expands the isolation and quarantine period for healthcare workers.

When the CDC shortened the isolation period for COVID-19 infection from 10 days to 5 days at the end of December, 2021, the NYS DOH and our employers quickly followed suit. NYSNA and other healthcare unions protested vehemently that this practice would put both patients and healthcare workers at increased risk of exposure. NYSNA demands that our employers immediately implement the updated DOH isolation and quarantine protocols.

The new NYS DOH advisory states that:

Healthcare personnel infected with COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, must:
- Isolate for 10 days or 7 days with a negative test (if asymptomatic or mild-moderate illness with improving symptoms*)

Healthcare personnel who are up to date with vaccination (fully vaccinated plus boosted) who are exposed to COVID-19:
- Have no work restrictions but must test negative on days 1 and 5-7

Healthcare personnel who are not up to date on COVID-19 vaccines (have not completed initial vaccine series and/or are not boosted) and are exposed to COVID-19, must:
- Begin quarantine immediately and continue to quarantine throughout the isolation period of the person with COVID-19.
- Continue to quarantine for an additional 5 days starting the day after the end of isolation for the person with COVID-19.
- Get tested at least 5 days after the end of isolation of the infected person that lives with them. See Infection Control FAQs for additional guidance for household contacts at https://bit.ly/isolation-protocol
- If you test negative, you can leave the home but should continue to wear a well-fitting mask when around others at home and in public until 10 days after the end of isolation for the person with COVID-19.
- Healthcare personnel who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 in the community should report their exposure to their occupational health program and be evaluated on need for testing and work restriction. Continuous contact with an infected person that cannot be avoided (household contact), should generally be classified as having a higher-risk exposure.

For more information contact: healthandsafety@nysna.org
Note that earlier CDC and NYS DOH guidance did not include any testing requirements, a serious concern voiced by healthcare unions and many in the infectious disease community.

The NYS DOH does allow for shorter isolation and quarantine work restriction periods when a healthcare facility is in a COVID-19 contingency or crisis state. The CDC cautions that allowing healthcare workers with SARS-CoV-2 infection or higher-risk exposures to return to work before meeting the conventional criteria could result in healthcare-associated SARS-CoV-2 transmission. Transition to contingency or crisis strategies is based on a facility’s ability to provide essential services. Facilities must notify NYS DOH if crisis strategies are required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccination Status</th>
<th>CDC Conventional Strategies</th>
<th>CDC Contingency Strategies</th>
<th>CDC Crisis Strategies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infected</td>
<td>10 days OR 7 days with negative test¹, if asymptomatic or mild-moderate illness with improving symptoms</td>
<td>5 days with/without negative test, if asymptomatic or mild-moderate illness with improving symptoms</td>
<td>Facilities contact NYSDOH. No work restrictions, with prioritization considerations (e.g., types of patients they care for).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposed</td>
<td>No work restrictions, negative test on days 1⁴ and 5-7</td>
<td>No work restrictions</td>
<td>No work restrictions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For more detailed information, visit the NYS DOH website at [https://on.ny.gov/3K9G8F2](https://on.ny.gov/3K9G8F2)

If your facility is not following this new NYS DOH isolation and quarantine advisory, contact your NYSNA representative immediately. NYSNA will continue to advocate for science and data-driven responses to the COVID-19 pandemic at the federal, state and facility level.

Regardless of DOH or CDC guidance, RNs do not have to work sick. Notify your rep if you are being pressured to return to work before you are well enough to perform your duties. We recommend contacting your medical provider and obtaining documentation if you are directed to return to work. RNs have a right to up to 14 calendar days of COVID sick leave above and beyond your sick bank.