
NEW MEXICO HEALTH ALERT NETWORK (HAN)

ADVISORY

Updated guidance on contact tracing in healthcare settings and return-to-work criteria for healthcare personnel

April 16, 2020

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its COVID-19 guidance for contact tracing in healthcare settings and the return-to-work criteria for healthcare workers with confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) advises healthcare facilities to consider revising their existing protocols according to the updated CDC guidance. The key updates are listed below.

Contact tracing for healthcare worker exposure to a confirmed COVID-19 patient

- Given the role of asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals in COVID-19 transmission, healthcare workers who were exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 patient and involved in patient care should implement universal source control routinely:
 - Always wear a facemask while in the healthcare facility, or N95 respirator as indicated for some direct care activities.
 - Screen for fever and symptoms (cough, shortness of breath) before every shift.
- Healthcare facilities should consider foregoing contact tracing for healthcare workers who were exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 patient.

Criteria for return-to-work of healthcare workers with confirmed or suspected COVID-19

CDC is now recommending a **test-based strategy** to determine when a healthcare worker may return to work.

Exclude from work until:

- Resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, **AND**
- Improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), **AND**
- Negative results of an FDA Emergency Use Authorized molecular assay for COVID-19 from at least two consecutive nasopharyngeal swab specimens collected ≥ 24 hours apart (total of two negative specimens).

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND RESPONSE

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If the test-based strategy cannot be used, then use a **non-test-based strategy**.

Exclude from work until:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed *since recovery* defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications **and** improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), **AND**
- At least 7 days have passed *since symptoms first appeared*.

A healthcare worker with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 who has not had any symptoms should be excluded from work until 10 days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test assuming they have not subsequently developed symptoms since their positive test.

Return to work practices and work restrictions for healthcare workers with confirmed or suspected COVID-19

- Always wear a facemask while in the healthcare facility until all symptoms are completely resolved or until 14 days after illness onset, whichever is longer.
 - A facemask should not be used as a replacement for an N95 or higher-level respirator (or other recommended PPE) when indicated, including when caring for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
 - Note: N95 or other respirators with an exhaust valve may not provide source control
- Be restricted from contact with severely immunocompromised patients (e.g., transplant, hematology-oncology) until 14 days after illness onset
- Self-monitor for symptoms and seek re-evaluation from occupational health if respiratory symptoms recur or worsen.

For more information, consult the [CDC guidance for Healthcare Professionals](#).

Resources

- [NMDOH COVID-19 Webpage](#)
- [CDC COVID-19 Webpage](#)
- [CDC Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings](#)
- [CDC Criteria for Return to Work for Healthcare Personnel with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19](#)
- **New Mexico Health Alert Network:** To register for the New Mexico Health Alert Network, go to <https://member.everbridge.net/index/453003085613008#/login> and click “Sign Up” at the bottom of the page. Provide all information on each screen, click on “Save and Continue,” and click on “Finish” at the end to begin receiving important health alerts and advisories.