

# **FAQ: *Exposure, testing and return to work (RTW) for healthcare workers***

## **1. How do I schedule a COVID-19 test?**

- A. **Schedule a COVID-19 test through MyChart** (preferred method and a new feature); **OR**
- B. Call the COVID-19 Employee Hotline at (508) 973-4968 for nurse triage and test scheduling

You will receive an email notification from **MyChart** as soon as the results are available.

Please check your **MyChart** to access your results (do not call the COVID-19 Results line, as our COVID-19 Results team is calling *only those who have a positive result*).

**Managers must notify Infection Prevention if a test performed on an employee at Southcoast Health results as positive and will collaborate with Infection Prevention for contact tracing and follow up for potentially exposed patients and staff, as indicated.**

**Outside Tests:** *If you receive a positive result from a test outside of Southcoast Health, you have an obligation to notify Infection Prevention for contact tracing and follow up for potentially exposed patients and staff, as indicated.*

During regular business hours, please call Infection Prevention at 508-973-5497. During off hours, send a confidential email to [infectionprevention@southcoast.org](mailto:infectionprevention@southcoast.org).

For urgent needs, off hours, utilize the Page Operator (or SmartWeb) to page the Infection Prevention person on call.

## **2. Can I request an expedited COVID-19 test for myself?**

You must request approval for an expedited test through the Incident Command Center (ICC). The ICC number is (508) 973-5801 and is staffed 24/7.

Southcoast Health may deny requests for expedited testing, regardless of reason, if there are insufficient PCR supplies on hand to accommodate the request and/or there is a need to prioritize testing for acutely ill patients. In this instance, the testing swab would be sent to an outside lab for PCR processing.

### 3. How is a close contact/unprotected exposure defined?

Being within 6 feet of a confirmed or clinically diagnosed COVID-19 person for at least 15 minutes, while the person was symptomatic or within the 2 days before symptom onset (or date of positive if they were asymptomatic) **while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment or PPE (facemask, eye protection), OR**

Having direct contact with infectious secretions of a confirmed or clinically diagnosed COVID-19 case (e.g., being coughed on) **while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment or PPE (facemask, eye protection)** or facemask, eye protection, gown and gloves if aerosol generating procedures (AGP) are performed.

In general, if you experience an unprotected exposure, you should monitor yourself diligently for temperature  $>100^{\circ}$  and any established COVID-related symptoms for 14 days from time of exposure.

**\*\*\*If any COVID-related symptoms develop, do not report to work.\*\*\***

### 4. If I have mild COVID symptoms (with or without exposure to a COVID-positive individual):

*Do I need to get tested before I can come to work?*

Yes, if you have symptoms, you should be tested for COVID-19 as soon as possible.

*Can I come to work while I await the results of my test?*

No, you cannot remain at or report to work. You must stay home and self-isolate while waiting for test results. While self-isolating at home, you should wear a mask and distance yourself from household members.

You should also notify your manager.

## 5. When can I return to work after absence due to COVID-19?

You can return to work only after you are fever-free for at least 24 hours, your symptoms have improved, 10 days have elapsed since symptom onset (or first positive test) **AND** you receive clearance from Employee Health.

You may end self-isolation on day 11.

When you are ready to return to work, you should submit the information listed below using the [Return to Work Form](#).

**Please DO NOT CALL Employee Health directly.**

Please include the following information: DOB, phone number, COVID test date, test result (positive), description of symptoms (please specify all symptoms), date symptoms started, whether symptoms have improved, and dates out of work

You will be contacted by phone and/or email within 24 hours after submitting information.

Southcoast is monitoring and responding to RTW messages every day, including weekends and holidays.

## 6. If I have no symptoms and have been exposed to a household member who has or does not have symptoms and has not yet obtained test results:

*Do I need to get tested before I can come to work?*

A secondary exposure does not require testing or isolation, just continued self-monitoring. If your household member's results come back positive, even if you have been vaccinated, follow the guidelines in question 7 below.

## 7. If I have no symptoms but have had an exposure to a person who has tested positive:

*Do I need to get tested before I can come to work?*

- Work related exposure: You must be laboratory tested 3-5 days after the exposure for COVID-19, even if you have been vaccinated; you may continue to work if you remain asymptomatic.
- Community exposure (household member, non-work related or other): You are restricted from working until you have a negative COVID-19 test (antigen test is sufficient), even if you have been vaccinated. You must receive clearance from Employee Health prior to returning to work.
  - You must continue to quarantine for non-working hours **unless you are FULLY vaccinated or have fully recovered from COVID-19 within 3 months.**
  - **If you are not fully vaccinated, you are required to quarantine (outside of working) for a total of 10 days (RTW Day 11) or 7 days if your COVID test is on Day 5 or later.**
  - You must continue to actively monitor for any symptoms for 14 days from time of exposure. If they develop, you must self-isolate and schedule testing.

### *Can I come to work while I await the results of my test?*

ONLY if you are FULLY vaccinated or have fully recovered from COVID-19 within 3 months. For a non-workplace exposure, you must stay out of work while awaiting the results of your test and then obtain Employee Health clearance to return.

You should also inform your manager and self-isolate. While self-isolating at home, wear a mask and distance yourself from household members.

### **8. One of my co-workers tested positive, but that person had no symptoms when I was working with them:**

#### *If I have no symptoms, do I need to get tested?*

If you meet the definition of close contact/unprotected exposure, then you must be tested for COVID-19 (see question 7), even if you have been vaccinated. Though the risk is small, about 5%, vaccinated individuals may acquire COVID-19.

You must also complete an [ART form](#), which you can obtain from the Employee Health department, even if you have received the COVID-19

vaccine.

Infection Prevention will perform contact tracing in conjunction with unit leadership to identify close unprotected contacts.

***Can I still come to work with test pending?***

Yes, you may work following a workplace exposure if you are not experiencing COVID-related symptoms.

However, you must wear mask and eye protection while working, quarantine when not working and self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days after exposure.

If you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19, you must stop working and arrange to get re-tested. Please follow the guidelines provided in question 4 above.

**9. Are there side effects with the vaccine? What do I do if I experience side effects from the vaccine? If I have side effects can I still work?**

Following vaccination, you may experience some common side effects that normally subside within 3 days, such as: pain or swelling at injection site, low grade fever <101F, chills, fatigue, headache or muscle and joint pains.

Please see below or go to the COVID-19 Vaccination Information page on the intranet for important information on managing side effects and on work restrictions, located here:

<http://intranet.southcoast.org/southcoast/covid.cfm>.

**POST COVID-19 VACCINATION: HEALTHCARE WORKER SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT**

Following - vaccination, you may experience some common side effects that normally subside within 3 days, such as: Pain or swelling at injection site, low grade fever <101F, chills, fatigue, headache or muscle and joint pains.

SYMPTOMS	PCR TEST	WORK RESTRICTIONS	WHAT DO I DO?
Local site reaction only (mild swelling, redness, bruising, warmth)	NO	NO RESTRICTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SELF-MONITOR</li> <li>• CAN WORK IF MILD</li> <li>• IF SIGNS OF URTICARIA OR ANAPHYLAXIS, SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE</li> </ul>
Mild allergic symptoms such as rash, hives or itching	NO	NO RESTRICTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SELF-MONITOR</li> <li>• CAN WORK IF MILD</li> <li>• IF SIGNS OF URTICARIA OR ANAPHYLAXIS, SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE</li> </ul>
< 3 days post-vaccination with one or more of the following mild symptoms (vaccination is day 1): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mild symptoms with Temp up to 101F</li> <li>• Mild headache</li> <li>• Mild fatigue or tiredness</li> <li>• Mild muscle aches or mild joint pains.</li> </ul> NO PRIOR COVID-19 OR >90 DAYS SINCE COVID-19	YES	NO RESTRICTION WHILE TEST IS PENDING/NEGATIVE  Able to work wearing appropriate PPE while PCR test is pending.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOTIFY MANAGER</li> <li>• ENTER ONLINE FORM FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH</li> <li>• SCHEDULE PCR ON MYCHART</li> <li>• POSITIVE PCR: CONFER WITH OCC HEALTH AND MANAGER REGARDING RTW</li> </ul>
ABOVE WITH RECENT COVID-19 INFECTION (<90 DAYS)	NO	NO RESTRICTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SELF-MONITOR</li> <li>• CAN WORK IF MILD</li> </ul>
< 3 days post-vaccination, with any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever ≥ 101F or</li> <li>• Severe headache or</li> <li>• Severe fatigue characterized by sense of exhaustion leading to curtailment of daily activities or</li> <li>• Severe myalgias (muscle aches) or</li> <li>• Severe arthralgias (joint pains) or any other symptoms COVID-19 symptoms (Fever, cough, SOB, loss of taste or smell, sore throat)</li> </ul> NO PRIOR COVID-19 OR >90 DAYS SINCE COVID-19	YES	RESTRICTED FROM WORKING ONSITE  Restricted from working onsite pending COVID-19 test results. Requires clearance from Employee Health for return to work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOTIFY MANAGER</li> <li>• ENTER ONLINE FORM FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH</li> <li>• SCHEDULE PCR ON MYCHART</li> <li>• CONFER WITH OCC HEALTH AND MANAGER REGARDING RETURN TO WORK</li> </ul>
ABOVE WITH RECENT COVID-19 INFECTION (<90 DAYS)	NO	Restricted from working onsite pending symptom abatement and clearance from Employee Health for return to work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOTIFY MANAGER</li> <li>• ENTER ONLINE FORM FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH</li> <li>• CONFER WITH OCC HEALTH AND MANAGER REGARDING RETURN TO WORK</li> </ul>

\* Staff are required to report certain adverse events following vaccination to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) at:

<https://vaers.hhs.gov/reportevent.html>. Report severe symptoms to Employee Health.

This is based on Mass DPH Guidance from December 16, 2020 entitled Considerations for Health Care Personnel After COVID-19 Vaccination.

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For more details, refer to [HCP Vaccination Work Guidance \(12/16/20\)](#) issued by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

10. I received my second dose of vaccine and Massachusetts is fully reopening on May 29, with the Commonwealth’s State of Emergency Order ending on June 15, what Southcoast guidelines and procedures must I follow for PCR testing and quarantining, masking, travel, and Return to Work?

Most all guidelines and procedures from before the Commonwealth’s May 21 announcement are still in place for health care facilities and should be followed. However, please keep up to date on any changes to guidelines and procedures as they occur.

Quarantining is no longer required for employees fully vaccinated (14 days after 2<sup>nd</sup> Pfizer/Moderna dose or after the single Jonson & Johnson dose).

Per state mandate regarding healthcare facilities and providers, masks must still be worn by everyone in Southcoast facilities at all times, although N95s will only be required when caring for a patient under investigation (PUI) or COVID-positive patient or performing an aerosol generating procedure (AGP). N95s will no longer be required at all times in the Emergency Departments.

Our screening processes continues without change. This includes existing staffed screening stations at entry points, which will remain in place, as well as employee attestation processes – with the following updates for fully vaccinated individuals:

- If you travel in the United States, you do not need to get tested before or after travel or self-quarantine after travel.
- You need to pay close attention to the situation at your international destination before traveling outside the United States.
- You do NOT need to get tested before leaving the United States unless your destination requires it.
- You still need to show a negative test result or documentation of recovery from COVID-19 before boarding an international flight to the United States.
- You should still get tested 3-5 days after international travel. You do NOT need to self-quarantine after arriving in the United States.

Our gathering policy – which allows for in-person breaks and meetings among fully vaccinated staff, with a limit of 10 people to a room – will continue with no changes for now.

Please maintain social distancing at all times as a baseline intervention, and ensure that patients and visitors do so, as well.

**Additionally, even if vaccinated, healthcare workers must still obtain a negative test prior to returning to work following household or community exposure.**

*Regardless of whether one is vaccinated or not:*

- We must all continue to use patience and take personal responsibility.
- Use PPE appropriately. Refer to the COVID Hub for the most up-to-date guidance.
- Continue to practice diligent hand hygiene.
- Self-monitor for any symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
- Get tested if you experience COVID-19 symptoms.
- Exposure rules and return to work algorithms must be followed for all employees. Refer to the relevant documents on the COVID-19 Hub page for up-to-date information.

### **Additional Information**

For more details, please also refer to ...

[Return to Work Decision Algorithm for ASYMPTOMATIC Employees 09/22/2021](#)

[Return to Work Decision Algorithm for SYMPTOMATIC Employees 12/18/2020](#)