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Employment Update: Clarifying CDC Confusion on Testing and Exposure Guidelines *Posted August 27, 2020*

If you are confused about COVID-19 testing and when employees should quarantine, don't worry – you are not alone. The CDC and the media have done a good job of creating that confusion. Here are some simple truths.

1. The CDC's primary message for preventing the spread of COVID-19 remains the same:
 - Wear a mask
 - Wash hands often
 - Stay 6 feet from others
2. The official CDC considerations for who should get tested are found here at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/diagnostic-testing.html>. They include:
 - People who have symptoms of COVID-19
 - People who have had close contact (within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes) with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19
 - People who have been asked or referred to get tested by their healthcare provider, local or state health department

Not everyone needs to be tested, but that does not mean that no one should be tested. If you do get tested, you should self-quarantine/isolate at home pending test results and follow the advice of your health care provider or a public health professional.

3. Testing is not the best way to prevent the spread of the virus because:
 - The test only tells you if you are infected now
 - The incubation period is 14 days, so if you test negative, you could still become infected during that period
4. **Quarantine:** The CDC says to stay home for **14 days** after your last contact with a person who has COVID-19. This is the most difficult to monitor and enforce as an employer because it involves time away from work and the knowledge that an employee may have been exposed. This often comes too late to be effective. Quarantining can also be frustrating because an employee who is not COVID positive may be off 14 days on quarantine, while an employee who tested positive might be able to return in 10 days if symptoms have resolved (or never appeared).

Here is a detailed look at the CDC's recommendations on quarantining including calendar graphics with specific scenarios that are very helpful: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/quarantine.html>

5. What to do if Employee Gets Sick or is Exposed to COVID-19:
 - Employees should not come to work if they test positive for COVID-19, have COVID-19 symptoms, or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 or COVID-19 symptoms (whether a confirmed or suspected case).
 - If the sick employee is at work they should be immediately separated from other employees and customers and should be sent home.

- Close off areas used by the sick employee and do not use those areas until after cleaning and disinfecting them. The CDC recommends waiting at least 24 hours before cleaning and disinfecting, or as long as possible.
- Notify all employees who had close contact for a prolonged period of time (<6 feet for more than 15 minutes) with the sick employee that they may have been exposed to COVID-19, while maintaining confidentiality (i.e. do not reveal the sick employee's name or any other confidential medical information).
- Employees who had close contact with the sick employee as described above should self-isolate for a full 14 days and self-monitor for symptoms. If they develop symptoms, they would then follow the same protocol for sick employees.
 - The same rule applies to employees who had close contact with someone outside the workplace who tests positive for COVID-19 or has COVID-19 symptoms, such as a family member. Those employees should self-isolate for 14 days, monitor symptoms, and follow the protocols for sick employees if they develop symptoms. (See calendar from CDC website above about how this quarantine period might play out.)
 - For employees that had close contact with another employee who had close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19 or has COVID-19 symptoms (i.e. two degrees of separation from the sick employee), no self-isolation is necessary unless the employee who had direct contact with a sick person develops symptoms themselves or tests positive for COVID-19. However, those employees should still be advised to self-monitor their symptoms and stay home if any symptoms develop.
- Notify County health officials and customers (if possible) of any possible case of COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Sick employees should not return to work until they have met the CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation
 - If the employee had symptoms of COVID-19 or tested positive for COVID-19 they can return to work if 24 hours have passed with no fever without the use of fever reducing medicine, their symptoms have improved, and 10 days have passed since the symptoms first appeared.
 - If the employee tested positive for COVID-19 but never developed symptoms they can return to work if 10 days have passed since the date of the test.
 - Re-testing before returning to work is not required or recommended by the CDC.