

COVID-19 Update September 10, 2020
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In the past two weeks, I have been asked more quarantine and isolation questions than during the entire summer, so I am devoting much of this note to those subjects.

I have been amazed and bewildered at the number of physicians, educators and individuals who have contacted me regarding persons with symptoms who attended public events **WHILE THEY HAD SYMPTOMS** and are now asking for advice “what to do”.

Absolutely no one - not the ba’alei simcha, chavrusa, close relatives or friends - should **EVER attend any public gathering while experiencing any symptoms**. Even if you are masked and distanced, do not attend. Similarly, if you have been COVID-19 tested and are awaiting the results, do not attend. **You MUST stay home under all circumstances** till you are proven to be not contagious. This is not infection control 1.1 – this is the most basic level of erhlechkeit.

Staying home keeps everyone else safe - and allows businesses, shuls and schools to remain OPEN safely. It also prevents the inevitable questions that impact so many people afterwards - was I exposed? Do I need to quarantine? What about my family?

It usually takes between 2 - 14 days for symptoms to develop after exposure to COVID-19. In some studies, infected patients were contagious an average of 4 days prior to developing symptoms, although many remain asymptomatic for the entire duration of their COVID-19 infection.

What does quarantine mean?

The CDC states that quarantine is used to keep people exposed to COVID-19 away from all others. Quarantine helps prevent spread of disease that can occur before a person knows they are sick and / or are infected with the virus without feeling symptoms. People in quarantine should stay home, separate themselves from others, monitor their health, and follow directions from their physician, state or local health department.

Quarantine means not being within 6 feet of anyone else during the entire period of time that you require quarantine. Ideally, you should be in a separate room / area using separate eating, bathroom and sleeping quarters from everyone else. Where that is simply not possible, you must be masked and distanced from the others living there as best as possible at all times.

Who should be in quarantine?

People who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 MUST quarantine for 14 days. Not 8 days. Not 10 days. But 14 days. **A negative test does not change anything.**

The only exceptions are people who are recovered from recent COVID-19 (within 3 months) infection. People who tested positive for COVID-19 and Boruch Hashem recovered (see below for how long it takes to not be contagious) do not need to quarantine if exposed. They do not need to get tested again for up to 3 months - as long as they do not develop new symptoms. People who develop new symptoms within 3 months of their first bout of COVID-19 should be seen by their physician. Repeat testing may be indicated if there is no other cause identified for their symptoms.

What counts as “close contact”?

- You were within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more;
- You provided care at home to someone who is sick with COVID-19;
- You had direct physical contact with the person (hugged or kissed them);
- You shared eating or drinking utensils;
- They sneezed, coughed, or somehow got respiratory droplets on you.

If both parties were masked for the entire time, then an exposure / close contact is usually not considered to be significant and quarantine is not needed. If only one person was masked, it is not clear what the risk is.

How do you count the 14 days of quarantine?

The 14 days start from the LAST exposure to a COVID-19 patient. The CDC states that if you live with someone with COVID-19 and started a 14-day quarantine period, and then another household member gets sick with COVID-19, you need to restart a 14 day quarantine period from the last day you had close contact with anyone in your house who has COVID-19. Any time a new household member gets sick with COVID-19 and you had close contact, you will need to restart your quarantine. Hence, as possible, do not be near people in your house who have COVID-19.

If I test negative while in quarantine, can I stop quarantining?

Absolutely NOT. The CDC states: Even if you test negative for COVID-19 or feel healthy, you should stay home (quarantine) for the full 14 days since symptoms may still appear up to 14 days after COVID-19 exposure. Under rare circumstances, a physician may need to order retesting for a specific purpose.

If I have COVID-19, how long do I need to isolate? Do I need to re-test?

As an aside, we use the term “isolation” for people with COVID-19, as opposed to quarantine for people exposed to someone with COVID-19. For most persons with COVID-19 illness, isolation and precautions can generally be discontinued 10 days after symptom onset and resolution of fever for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medications, and with improvement of other symptoms. A limited number of persons with severe illness may produce replication-competent (“live”) virus beyond 10 days that may warrant extending duration of isolation and precautions for up to 20 days after symptom onset; consider consultation with infection control experts.

Retesting is usually not recommended within 3 months after the date of symptom onset for the initial COVID-19 infection unless specifically recommended by a physician for clinical reasons.

We have a wonderful group of physicians in our neighborhood who are committed to providing you with safe expert COVID-19 care. Please do not hesitate to call upon them for a telehealth or regular visit to assess your COVID-19 concerns and exposures. Everyone exposed, or indeed infected should be under a physician’s supervision even if a visit is not necessary. Monitoring is critical. Patients at all ages are at increased risk if they have co-morbidities. Two major underlying medical issues, obesity and hypertension, were just again documented in a JAMA paper as being predictors of more severe disease for even younger individuals.

Please follow these guidelines scrupulously as they are essential to prevent real serious illness – regardless of the incidence of COVID-19 in any neighborhood.