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**Revised Protocols for the Implementation of Isolation for Individuals who Test Positive for COVID-19 and Precautions for Individuals Exposed to COVID-19 Residing in OPWDD Certified Facilities**

This advisory supersedes OPWDD’s December 14, 2022, guidance titled “Revised Protocols for the Implementation of Isolation and Quarantine of Individuals in OPWDD Certified Facilities Following COVID-19 Infection” and further supersedes any other guidance from OPWDD on this topic. **The updates to this guidance document are consistent with changes made by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and per the NYS Department of Health document titled “U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Revisions to COVID-19 Antigen Tests: Requirements for Repeat Serial Testing / Frequently Asked Questions” dated March 20, 2023.** This guidance document will further clarify when individuals should be placed on isolation and/or when COVID-19 precautions should be implemented in NYS Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) certified facilities. The guidelines found within this document apply to providers of services to individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities certified and/or operated by OPWDD. This guidance is based on recent updates made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Please note that the CDC and the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH) guidance is frequently updated, and this guidance is, therefore, subject to change.

- This guidance pertains to all individuals living in OPWDD’s certified residential settings.
- Additional isolation, precautions, and testing guidance for those individuals who reside in an Intermediate Care Facility (ICF), can be found in the section of this document titled “Guidance for ICFs”.
- Guidance for additional masking requirements related to Specialty Hospitals can be found in the section of this document titled Additional Masking Requirements for Specialty Hospitals.

OPWDD continues to promote the importance of being up to date with vaccination as a way of protecting the individuals we support and OPWDD employees against serious illness, hospitalization, and death.

**Precautions for Individuals Exposed to COVID-19**

Effective the date of this document, individuals residing in an Individual Residential Alternative (IRA) or a Community Residence (CR) who are exposed to or are in close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 no longer need to quarantine so long as they remain asymptomatic. This is regardless of vaccination status. Any individual who has been exposed to, or who has been in close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 must start the following precautions immediately:

- Wear a mask as soon as the exposure is known.

- Masks should be worn for a full 10 days.
  - Day 0 is the day of your last exposure to someone with COVID-19
  - Day 1 is the first full day after your last exposure
- Do not go places where you are unable to wear a mask.
- Take extra precautions - see guidance at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html> if you will be around people who are more likely to get very sick from COVID-19 (i.e., those who are immunocompromised).
- Get tested on day 6 (even if symptoms do not develop).

### **Updated Requirements for Antigen Testing**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has revised the emergency use authorization (EUA) of COVID-19 antigen tests. Serial (repeat) testing is now required for symptomatic individuals who use over-the-counter antigen tests, and it is recommended that asymptomatic (exposed) individuals also be tested. The following process should be followed when using over-the-counter antigen tests:

#### **Symptomatic Individuals:**

- The first test should be taken immediately for those who have symptoms. This is day 1.
- The second test is taken **ONLY** if the first test is negative and should be done on day 3.
- Individuals who are symptomatic should be isolated during serial testing.
- If the second test is negative, they can come out of isolation only if symptoms are improving and the individual is fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication.
- If the second test is positive, isolation continues through day 5. If after day 5 symptoms are improving and the individual is fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication isolation can be discontinued.

#### **Asymptomatic Individuals who are tested:**

- The first test should be taken 5 days after the known exposure. Day 0 is the date of last known exposure.
- The second test should be taken if the first test is negative, with at least 48 hours between the first and second test.
- If the second test is positive, the individual would begin isolation.
- If the second test is negative, the individual would be tested a third time, with at least 48 hours between the second and third test. If this test is positive, the individual would begin isolation. If the 3<sup>rd</sup> test is negative, they are done with testing.
- Individuals who have been exposed, are asymptomatic and are being tested are subject to precautions. They are not subject to isolation unless they receive a positive test.

Additional information on this is available at:

[https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/03/faq\\_serial\\_testing\\_requirements.pdf](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2023/03/faq_serial_testing_requirements.pdf)

## **Isolation and Precautions for Individuals with COVID-19**

Regardless of vaccination status, individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 must isolate from others. Additionally, if someone is tested as a result of the development of symptoms, the following precautions must be followed pending test results:

- Isolate immediately.
- Get tested.
- Remain in isolation until results indicate negative for COVID-19.
  - If the first test is negative, another test should be taken on day 3
  - If the test is positive, the individual must isolate for at least 5 days
  - If the day 3 test is negative, isolation may end

The following precautions should be followed during an isolation period:

- All individuals should stay home, in a separate room from other household members, if possible, for at least 5 full days (day 0 is the first day of symptoms, or the date of the positive test results for those who are asymptomatic).
- Wear a high-quality mask when around others in the residence.
- Individuals should not attend programming or other community activities.
- Use a separate bathroom if possible.
- Take steps to improve ventilation at home if possible.
- Don't share personal household items, like cups, towels, and utensils.
- Monitor symptoms and if an individual has an emergency warning sign (including trouble breathing), seek emergency medical care immediately.

## **Ending Isolation**

Ending isolation is currently based on how serious the COVID-19 symptoms were:

If there were NO symptoms:

- Isolation may end after day 5.

If there WERE symptoms:

- Isolation may end after day 5 if the following criteria are met:
  - The individual is fever-free for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medication, and
  - Symptoms are improving (\*Note that loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation)
- If there is still a fever, or other symptoms are NOT improving, isolation must continue until symptoms improve (i.e., no fever for 24-hours without the use of fever-reducing medication).
- If the individual had a moderate illness (i.e., shortness of breath, difficulty breathing) or severe illness, meaning the individual was hospitalized due to COVID-19, or they have a weakened immune system, isolation must continue through day 10.
  - Additionally, if an individual had a severe illness or already had a weakened immune system, a physician should be consulted before ending isolation - This may require a COVID-19 test to come off isolation

- After isolation has ended, if COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen, isolation should restart at day 0.

## **Removing Masks After Isolation**

The CDC continues to recommend masking for the full 10 days for an individual who has tested positive for COVID.

The following guidelines should be followed for masking:

- Individuals who have tested positive should be encouraged to wear a well-fitting mask for the full 10 days (5 days of isolation and days 6-10 after isolation ends).
- For those individuals who are unable to tolerate wearing a mask, after the 5-day isolation period has ended and they are improving (no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and symptoms are decreasing), the following steps may be followed:
  - Testing can be done at this time - With two sequential negative tests, 48 hours apart, the mask may be removed sooner than day 10 (i.e., the mask can be removed after the **second** test if it is negative)
  - If the test continues to be positive, they should continue to isolate through day 10

Information on this may be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/isolation.html>

### **Testing**

The CDC no longer recommends routine screening of individuals who do not have symptoms and with no known exposure. However, in addition to monitoring for symptoms, individuals (not in ICF settings) who have been exposed to COVID-19 should test at day 6. In addition, any individual in any certified residence experiencing symptoms must test immediately and isolate pending test results. Symptoms may include:

- Fever or **chills**
- Loss of taste or smell
- New or increased cough
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing
- Muscle or body aches
- Sore throat
- **Fatigue**
- **Headache**
- **Congestion or runny nose**
- **Nausea or vomiting**
- **Diarrhea**

**OPWDD certified programs are strongly encouraged to review and, as necessary, strengthen all health and safety measures to compensate for the end of universal masking.** These include promoting vaccination, encouraging COVID-19 testing, improved ventilation, social distancing, cleaning and disinfection, excluding sick individuals from program, and proper hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.

There are still circumstances when masking should be used in certified programs such

as described in the precautions and isolation sections of this document. In addition, individuals and staff in an OPWDD certified program should still wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status, in the following circumstances:

- If they are moderately-to-severely immunocompromised and have discussed the need to mask with their healthcare provider(s);
- If they feel more comfortable wearing a mask for personal reasons;
- If they are required to mask by their municipality (city/county);
- If required to mask by any relevant federal licensure or regulator;
- For staff: if required as part of a reasonable accommodation.

If they completed a minimum 5-day isolation period because of a COVID-19 infection and have returned to program, masks must be worn on days 6-10. Individuals who cannot tolerate the wearing of masks because of their disability may be exempt from masking requirements but cannot attend program until the end of the 10-day period.

To the extent that persons are expected or required to mask, masks may be removed when eating, drinking, napping, going outside, or playing a wind instrument. When masks are removed for these purposes, maximize social distancing as much as possible (ideally six feet or more).

### **Obtaining COVID-19 Antigen Test Kits**

Test kits previously sent to providers may be used for the screening as discussed in this guidance. If more test kits are needed, a partial listing of participating pharmacies can be found at <https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus>. This list is for those participating under Medicare. There is no up-front charge by Medicare for these test kits. Medicaid does require that the member pay for the test and complete the paperwork for reimbursement. This remains in effect until the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. **For those who are not dually eligible, Medicaid will continue to cover the cost of at home COVID-19 test kits through September 30, 2024.**

### **Transportation**

Masking and social distancing is not required for individuals on non-public transport vehicles. Note that those individuals who have been exposed and are required to wear a mask for other reasons (i.e., post-isolation period) should wear a mask during non-public transportation. Any individual utilizing public transportation should be encouraged to mask.

### **Reasonable Accommodation**

To the extent an employee has been granted a reasonable accommodation that may conflict with these guidelines, the employee must discuss their particular situation with their supervisors and or relevant agency staff and comply with alternative protective measures that are necessary to protect the health and safety of individuals and staff. Providers of ICFs should follow the CMS guidance about offering reasonable accommodations for staff who cannot be vaccinated.

### **Guidance for ICFs**

1. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate for time periods

dependent on severity of illness and immune competency. See “Duration of Transmission-Based Precautions for Patients with SARS-CoV-2 Infection” here: [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic](#).

2. Individuals who do not have symptoms and have been exposed or who had a close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19 do not need to follow COVID-19 transmission-based precautions unless they meet one of the following criteria:
  - Those who are unable to be tested or wear a mask as recommended for the 10 days following their exposure.
  - Those who are moderately to severely immunocompromised.
  - Those who reside in a home with others who are moderately to severely immunocompromised.
  - Those who reside in a home experiencing ongoing COVID-19 transmission that is not controlled with initial intervention.
  
3. Individuals who are exposed and are asymptomatic should wear a mask if tolerated and be tested on days 1, 3 and 5. If any of these tests are positive, testing can cease, and the individual should immediately be placed on isolation.

Information on COVID-19 transmission-based precautions can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html>

### **Additional Masking Requirements for Specialty Hospitals**

Effective September 7, 2022, OPWDD is no longer requiring that masks be universally worn in OPWDD certified or operated programs, except for Specialty Hospitals pursuant to DOH and CDC requirements for hospitals and health care settings. Staff and visitors will be required to wear appropriate face coverings in Specialty Hospitals. Nothing in this guidance shall prevent an individual municipality (county/city), federal regulator, or individual provider from maintaining a masking requirement if it chooses to do so. Providers should communicate the changes in masking to their employees and visitors.

### **Additional Questions**

General questions or comments about this advisory can be sent the OPWDD Director of Nursing and Health Services at: [nursingandhealthservices@opwdd.ny.gov](mailto:nursingandhealthservices@opwdd.ny.gov)