

## COVID-19 FAQ FOR COASTAL PATIENTS

### 1) I am a Coastal patient and would like to be tested. I have not had any exposures or symptoms.

At this time, Coastal is not testing patients who are asymptomatic (no symptoms), whether exposed or not. However, you can arrange your own testing through [portal.ri.gov](https://portal.ri.gov). That site is now also testing patients with minimal symptoms, such as a cough, and those who were a close contact of a known case. That site will also test individuals who need a test before traveling, attending a mass gathering, or prior to procedures.

### 2) How do I know if I am at risk for COVID-19 after being around someone who tested positive for COVID-19?

You are only at risk if you are a “close contact.” A close contact is based on how close you were and for how long. If you have been within six feet of someone who is positive for a total time of 15 minutes or more starting two days before their symptoms started, that is considered a close contact. Someone that you briefly interacted with from a distance of more than 6 feet is not a close contact. For example, if you were sitting next to someone in a room for more than 15 minutes, that would be a close contact. If you were walking, and someone walked by you, that would NOT be a close contact. Also, people are usually considered to be infectious only up to 10 days after their symptoms began, so being in contact with someone 12 days after their symptoms started is not a problem.

### 3) What should I do if I am identified as a close contact of a positive case?

The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) recommends that close contacts of a COVID-19 patient should take the following steps:

- Stay home for 10 days from the time they were last with you, as this is the new recommendation of the CDC and RI DOH for the quarantine period.
- Call your employer or school and let them know you are staying home on the recommendation of the RIDOH.
- RIDOH can provide you with an absence note from work or school.
- Watch for symptoms of COVID-19.
  - Also, check your temperature twice a day for a temperature greater than 100.4° F.
- Get tested if any symptoms of COVID-19 are present.
  - Call your healthcare provider for help getting tested or look online for a testing site.
  - If you are tested during your quarantine and test negative, you still must remain in quarantine.
  - If you are tested during your quarantine and test positive, you should continue to stay at home and speak with your healthcare provider for further care recommendations.
- Answer the phone when RIDOH calls. RIDOH will call close contacts to provide information about quarantining. Following quarantine instructions from RIDOH can slow the spread of COVID-19. RIDOH can also help get some things for people who need to stay home.
- If you are a close contact but have no symptoms, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does recommend you be tested. If you choose to be tested, you can arrange this through [portal.ri.gov](https://portal.ri.gov).

#### **4) I tested negative 2 days after being exposed to a confirmed positive person. Do I still need to quarantine?**

As above, **if you were identified as a close contact by the RIDOH and tested negative, you still need to quarantine for 10 days after your last exposure.** Symptoms can develop any time 2-10 days after exposure. If you have no symptoms and want to be tested, it should probably be done at least 5 days after the date of exposure.

#### **5) I was sick and tested positive last week. I am better and want to return to work. My employer says I can't come back to work until I have a negative test. How do I get re-tested?**

**At this time neither the CDC nor the RIDOH recommends repeat testing for any individual as a condition for returning to work.** In fact, they do not recommend repeat testing *for at least 90 days* after a positive test. Returning to work is based purely on the length of time since your symptoms started.

- Healthy individuals can return to work 10 days after symptom onset, without fever for 24 hours and significant improvement in their symptoms.
- If you were hospitalized with a severe infection OR have a medical condition that weakens your immune system, you should not return to work for 20 days after symptoms began.

**Coastal clinicians will not order repeat COVID-19 testing for the purposes of returning to work but can provide a letter stating that it is safe for you to return to work.**

#### **6) I had a brief exposure to someone who later tested positive. Can I work?**

If you had only a brief exposure, you were not a "close contact," and you can continue to work while being careful to watch for any symptoms of COVID-19.

#### **7) I was a "close contact" of a person with COVID-19. I don't have any symptoms. Can I work?**

It depends on what type of work you do.

- If you do not have symptoms and are a healthcare worker, you may continue to work with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- If your work is considered "critical infrastructure," you may be able to work. The RIDOH defines "critical infrastructure" as healthcare, public health, law enforcement, public safety, first responders, and those working in residential/shelter facilities and social services. If there are shortages of workers in these areas, and staffing cannot be accomplished using individuals who have not been exposed, then employers are allowed to let individuals who have been exposed work as long as they wear appropriate PPE, continue to have no symptoms, and have their symptoms and temperature checked every 4 hours while at work.
- If you do not work in any of these fields, you cannot return to work until you have quarantined for 10 days with no symptoms.

## **8) I live with my parents, and my father is sick and tested positive. What should I do?**

If you have no symptoms, Coastal is not able to test you at this time but you can schedule testing through [portal.ri.gov](https://portal.ri.gov).

- If you are living with someone who is positive, you will likely be contacted by the RI Department of Health for “contact tracing.”
- If you have had this type of “close contact,” you need to quarantine at home for 10 days to avoid the possibility of spreading COVID-19 further.
- If you have no symptoms through this 10-day period, you don’t need to do anything else.
- If you do develop symptoms, you should call your PCP for further evaluation and testing.

Further information is available at the RIDOH website: [Instructions for patients on what you and your close contacts should do if you have COVID](https://health.ri.gov/covid/whattodo/) (<https://health.ri.gov/covid/whattodo/>)

## **9) I haven’t had any exposures or close contacts with anyone who has been sick, but I wonder if I have had a COVID infection in the past. Should I have an antibody test?**

Antibody testing is not recommended by the CDC, RIDOH or the Infectious Disease Society of America. The problem is that antibody tests are not very helpful right now. Even with a negative test you may have had a previous infection, and a positive test does not guarantee immunity. All individuals should continue to follow CDC and RIDOH guidelines on masks, social distancing, and limiting social gatherings.

Further information from RIDOH available at: <https://health.ri.gov/publications/guidance/Statement-on-Antibody-Based-COVID-19-Testing.pdf>

## **10) I am sick and tested positive for COVID-19. What can I do to prevent the people in my house from becoming ill?**

It is recommended that all patients who are ill with COVID-19 but who do not require hospitalization remain at home as much as possible, essentially going out only to see their healthcare provider.

- Individuals should self-isolate, meaning that they should stay away from other members of their household as much as possible.
- Stay in a separate room, if possible; use a separate bathroom not shared with others, if possible; and do not eat or prepare food with others in your home.
- Don’t share towels or any personal care products, and do not use the same cooking utensils without washing them in hot water. All linens, towels, and clothing should be washed in hot water.
- When you are in contact with other people in your home, wear a mask if possible.
- Individuals in your home are considered “close contacts.”

While you stay at home, if you cannot avoid close contact with people you live with and keep a physical distance of 6 feet all the time, they must stay at home (quarantine) for the time that you are infected (10 days) plus an additional 10 days. This is because symptoms can develop up to 10 days after the last day of being in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

Further information is available at the RIDOH website: [Instructions for patients on what you and your close contacts should do if you have COVID](https://health.ri.gov/covid/whattodo/) (<https://health.ri.gov/covid/whattodo/>)

## **11) My husband is sick and tested positive. How do I help him?**

First, everything you do should be done in a way that also keeps you safe.

- Wear a mask and preferably gloves when in contact with someone who is infected.
- When possible, stay at least six feet away, and stay in a separate room.
- Make sure the patient takes any prescribed medications.
- Help make sure they stay hydrated by drinking lots of fluids.
- Provide light meals.
- Over-the-counter medications may help for fever, cough, or gastrointestinal symptoms.
- Watch for signs that the person may be becoming worse which may include shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new onset confusion, bluish discoloration of the lips, or trouble keeping the person awake.

## **12) I have respiratory symptoms.**

### **How do I know if I have COVID-19, the flu, or some other infection?**

It is not always possible to differentiate all types of infections. One symptom which is typical of COVID-19 but not the flu is loss of taste or smell. If you have either of these symptoms with other respiratory symptoms, you almost certainly have COVID-19. If you have symptoms, you should be in contact with your PCP who can advise you about testing and treatment options.

## **13) I have had respiratory symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19.**

### **How do I know if my infection will get bad enough to require me to go to the hospital?**

The vast majority of people with COVID-19 have mild infections and never need to be in the hospital. Unfortunately, there is no way to predict who will have a mild case and get better, and who will become worse and need to be in the hospital. You may also receive a daily text message from your care team to monitor your symptoms during your illness.

If you develop any of the following symptoms, you should check with your PCP or go to the hospital:

- Shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New onset confusion
- Bluish discoloration of the lips
- Trouble staying awake