

Important COVID-19 Update: Guidance on Negative Test vs. Symptom Resolution

When can a COVID + person be safely seen for prenatal care, return to work, or school?

- The world of COVID guidelines changes rapidly, and we are all challenged to stay current with the latest recommendations; this is true for determining when a COVID + patient is no longer infectious.
- Initially, a test-based strategy was recommended with one or 2 negative tests required to be considered no longer infectious.
- Now, a symptom-based strategy is recommended as per CDC guidance issued on 8/16/20: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html> which addresses both symptomatic and asymptomatic patients with COVID + tests.
- *Why?* Because we now know that patients can have “positive” COVID test results **well past their infectious period**. A “positive” test indicates the presence of viral RNA and **not** the possibility of transmission.
- In an attempt to ensure a safe environment for patients and employees, some medical practices have required negative COVID tests. ***This practice is not recommended.*** The New Mexico Department of Health recommendations are the same as the CDC recommendations: ***Negative tests are not required for returning to work or school or being accepted for clinical care.***

Duration of isolation and precautions for COVID + patients

- 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 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.
- **For persons who never develop symptoms, isolation and other precautions can be discontinued 10 days after the date of their first positive RT-PCR test for SARS-CoV-2 RNA.**

References:

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html>

NM Department of Health: <https://cv.nmhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/POLICIES-FOR-THE-PREVENTION-AND-CONTROL-OF-COVID-19-updated-8.30.20.pdf>