

Updated Discontinuation of Isolation Criteria for patients with COVID-19 at SFVA

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are the isolation discontinuation criteria changing?

- The updated criteria are based on the most recent [CDC recommendations](#) and are consistent with current San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) and ZSFG guidance.

Why are we no longer requiring repeat COVID-19 PCR testing at the end of the isolation period and during the 90 days following the first positive test in the absence of new signs or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19?

- Persons who recover from COVID-19 can continue to have positive PCR results for weeks to months.
- PCRs detect SARS-CoV-2 RNA and a positive test can reflect the presence of either live, infectious virus or non-infectious viral RNA debris.
- Most studies using viral cultures and epidemiologic data show that persons who have recovered from COVID-19 can be PCR-positive but are no longer contagious.
- Because of these issues, discontinuation of isolation criteria are based on time since symptom onset and improvement of COVID-19 symptoms rather than repeat COVID-19 testing.
- Repeat positive PCR results can lead to unnecessary delays in essential medical care.

What are the updated inpatient isolation discontinuation criteria?

- Persons who are not immunocompromised and have not had severe or critical COVID-19 illness:
 - At least 10 days have passed since onset of symptoms (or if asymptomatic since the first positive test collected)
 - Example: Patient with symptom onset 12/1/20 eligible to have isolation discontinued on 12/11/20 if other criteria are met.
 - No fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication)
 - Improvement of COVID-19 symptoms
- Immunocompromised persons and/or persons with severe or critical COVID-19 illness:
 - At least 20 days have passed since onset of symptoms (or if asymptomatic since first positive test collected)
 - Example: Patient with symptom onset 12/1/20 eligible to have isolation discontinued on 12/21/20 if other criteria are met.
 - No fever for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication)
 - Improvement of COVID-19 symptoms

How are “immunocompromised” and “severe or critical COVID-19 illness” defined?

- See [CDC recommendations](#) for details.

Once isolation discontinuation criteria are met, how can I remove the “COVID-19 (Confirmed)” banner?

- The banner is directed by VA National Requirements and it cannot be adjusted for a COVID 19 positive patient.
- A positive COVID 19 test automatically turns to “prior positive” or “recovered” after 14 days from the last COVID 19 test.

Is COVID 19 PCR testing indicated in the 90-day period following the first positive test?

- Do **not** re-test asymptomatic COVID-recovered patients as part of routine pre-procedure or admission testing during the 90 days after the initial positive test.
- Repeat COVID-19 PCR testing should no longer be used to determine discontinuation of isolation.

When should repeat COVID-19 PCR testing be considered during the 90-day period following infection?

- If new symptoms consistent with COVID-19 develop within 90 days, re-testing can be considered on a case-by-case basis because new or recurrent infection, while extremely rare, can occur.
 - ⇒ Place patients with new symptoms concerning for COVID-19 back onto Novel Respiratory Isolation
- Consider consultation with the Inpatient COVID ID Attending (pager 415-443-0427).

What happens after 90 days?

- After 90 days from the date of the first positive test have elapsed, indications for testing are the same as for people who have never been infected with SARS-CoV-2 including testing on hospital admission, testing pre-procedure, surveillance testing for selected groups, and testing because new symptoms have developed or an exposure has happened. This is based on the possibility that after 90 days, the risk that someone who has recovered from COVID-19 can develop a new, repeat infection may increase over time as their immunity wanes.
- Even after 90 days, some people will continue to shed non-infectious viral RNA debris from the initial infection.
 - Interpreting the significance of a positive test may be challenging.
 - After placing the patient on Novel Respiratory Isolation, consider evaluating the need for isolation on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Inpatient COVID ID Attending (pager 415-443-0427).