

CDC Changes Recommendations for Quarantine after Exposure and/or Travel



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On Dec. 2, 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new guidance to local health departments regarding their options and choices for shortening the length of quarantine after a person is exposed to the COVID-19 virus or has traveled internationally.

Post-Exposure Quarantine

Prior guidance required that a person quarantine for 14 days from the last exposure to a COVID-positive person, regardless of any negative test. The purpose of the quarantine period is to prevent spread of the virus by people who may be contagious but never develop symptoms, and to quickly identify the virus in those who do develop symptoms.

In this new guidance, the CDC noted that the 14-day quarantine period could pose personal and economic hardship on some and may reduce cooperation and compliance in communities. For these reasons, state and/or local health departments may choose to shorten the length of the quarantine period in two different ways:

1. The quarantine period may be shortened to 10 days for those who have been exposed but have not developed symptoms and have not been tested.
2. The quarantine period may be shortened to seven days for a person who has not developed symptoms and tests negative for the virus on or after day five of the quarantine period.

The new guidance notes that the 14-day period was based on the “outer bounds” of the virus’s incubation period. The risk of virus transmission under these new scenarios still exists: 1% to 10% risk of transmission for the 10-day quarantine period and 5% to 10% for the 7-day quarantine period. The circumstances facing any particular community may warrant a longer quarantine period. The full analysis is available at this [link](#).

Travel

CDC CHANGES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR QUARANTINE AFTER EXPOSURE AND/OR TRAVEL

The CDC also issued new guidance related to precautions that should be taken before and after individuals travel. The full CDC analysis is available [here](#). Of particular interest for employers, the CDC again states that the risk of transmission can be eliminated with a 14-day quarantine period after travel, but that such length could impose economic hardship or lead to poor compliance. Therefore, the CDC offers other options for state and local health departments to consider:

1. The quarantine period may be shortened to ten (10) days for a person who returns from international travel and is not tested, assuming symptoms have not developed.
2. The quarantine period may be shortened to seven (7) days for a person who has not developed symptoms and tests negative for the virus between days three and five after return from international travel.

Regardless of whether a test is performed, the CDC explains that people returning from international travel should isolate from those who are at higher risk for COVID-19 for the full 14-day period.

Given that the CDC directs individuals to follow the decisions of state and local health officials and that the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services has not yet updated its own guidance, employers should be careful about definitively changing any policies or practices at this time. Employers may consider providing the CDC's recommendations regarding pre- and post-travel precautions to employees prior to the holidays, and let employees know that they may be required to stay at home after traveling depending on the health recommendations at the time of their return. In all cases, employers should follow the directives of the local health department and an affected employee's healthcare provider.

Brooks Pierce attorneys have a broad range of experience assisting clients in developing workplace safety policies and complying with the various COVID-related guidance. If you have questions regarding the CDC's new guidelines, please reach out to a member of our labor and employment team, linked below.

Brooks Pierce is dedicated to keeping our clients fully informed during the COVID-19 crisis. For more information, please visit our [COVID-19 Response Resources](#) page.