



Coronavirus COVID-19

BC Centre for Disease Control | BC Ministry of Health



HOW YOU CAN SLOW THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Take care of others by taking care of yourself.

Wash your hands, don't touch your face, and stay home if you are sick.

Stay at Home and Physically Distance

Stay at home whenever you can. Maintain 2 meters distance from those outside of your household.

Interim Guidance on Return to Work for Health Care Workers with Symptoms of COVID-19

April 28, 2020

This guidance is for Workplace Health and Safety (WHS), Public Health (PH) staff and Medical Health Officers (MHOs) to support decision-making on return to work for health care workers (HCWs) **with symptoms of COVID-19**. This includes HCWs with confirmed COVID-19, HCWs that developed symptoms following exposure to confirmed cases of COVID-19, and suspected cases of COVID-19 (e.g., HCWs that developed symptoms but did not get tested for COVID-19).

The 'Health Care Worker Return to Work Decision Tree' in **Appendix A** summarizes the guidance and can be used as a tool to support decision-making. See BCCDC for an up-to-date list of symptoms of COVID-19: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/symptoms>

The recommendations in this document may change and will be amended as more information and evidence becomes available on the virus causing COVID-19.

The decision to discontinue self-isolation for HCWs should be made in consultation with WHS, PH and the Medical Health Officer, based on the potential risk of transmission to others. Factors to be considered include:

- Severity and length of the illness.
- Close contact with vulnerable populations (e.g., infants, seniors, immunocompromised).
- Feasibility of getting tested.
- Individual factors (e.g., pediatric and immunocompromised individuals may shed for longer).
- Potential risk of understaffing in health care facilities.
- Other situation and local context-specific factors.

There are references to two time periods of self-isolation with regards to COVID-19 in this document.

10-day period¹: Duration of illness after which a COVID-19 patient is unlikely to be infectious.

14-day period²: Incubation period during which a close contact is likely to develop COVID-19 illness.

¹ Liu, Y., Yan, L. M., Wan, L., Xiang, T. X., Le, A., Liu, J. M., ... & Zhang, W. (2020). Viral dynamics in mild and severe cases of COVID-19. *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*.

² Lauer, S. A., Grantz, K. H., Bi, Q., Jones, F. K., Zheng, Q., Meredith, H. R., ... & Lessler, J. (2020). The incubation period of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) from publicly reported confirmed cases: estimation and application. *Annals of internal medicine*.



Ministry of Health



BC Centre for Disease Control

If you have fever, a new cough, or are having difficulty breathing, call 8-1-1.

Non-medical inquiries (ex. travel, physical distancing): 1-888-COVID19 (1888-268-4319) or text 604-630-0300



Criteria for Return to Work:

If HCW tested POSITIVE for COVID-19, and they were NOT hospitalized or immunocompromised, the following conditions should be met prior to return to work:

- Resolution of symptoms (including resolution of fever without use of fever-reducing medication) other than residual cough¹; **AND**
- Minimum of 10 days have passed since the onset of the first symptom².

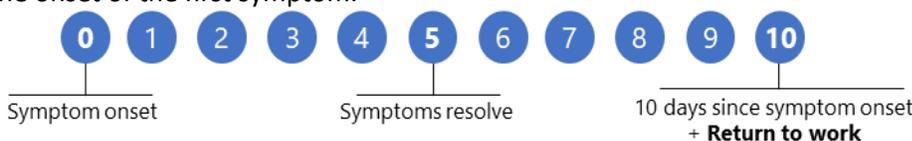
If HCW tested POSITIVE for COVID-19, and they were **HOSPITALIZED** or have a **COMPROMISED IMMUNE SYSTEM** (e.g., transplant, hematology-oncology), the following conditions should be met prior to return to work:

- Resolution of symptoms (including resolution of fever without use of fever-reducing medication) other than residual cough; **AND**
- Minimum of 10 days have passed since the onset of the first symptom; **AND**
- Two negative test results for COVID-19 from two consecutive NP swabs collected at least 24 hours apart. Note: Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the MHO.

1. The residual dry cough after 10 days of symptom onset may persist for several weeks and is not considered to be infectious, as long as all other symptoms have resolved. This includes temperature being back to normal without the use of fever-reducing medication (e.g., acetaminophen or ibuprofen) and improvement in clinical symptoms, including respiratory, gastrointestinal and systemic symptoms.
2. Testing for those not hospitalized or immunocompromised is NOT required; however, if feasible in some settings, a HCW may obtain two negative NP swabs 24h apart once symptoms have resolved to allow them to return to work *prior* to completing the 10-day self-isolation period.

Examples for HCW who tested positive for COVID-19: Legend - **10-day period** **14-day period** **Other**

- Even if symptoms have resolved earlier, HCW may only return to work once it has been 10 days since the onset of the first symptom.



- If 10 days have passed since the onset of the first symptom, however the HCW still has a fever, they may not return to work until their fever has resolved *without* the use of fever-reducing medications.



- If HCW was hospitalized, but symptoms have resolved and 10 days have passed, the HCW must receive two negative test results before returning to work, unless directed otherwise by the MHO.



If HCW tested **NEGATIVE** for COVID-19, the following conditions should be met prior to return to work:

- Resolution of symptoms (including resolution of fever without use of fever-reducing medication) other than residual cough.

HCWs who tested negative for COVID-19 but continue to have common cold or influenza-like symptoms should be excluded from work until symptoms resolve. *If HCW has an alternate diagnosis or symptoms indicating they are sick with another illness, the return to work recommendation should be based on that diagnosis and the relevant occupational health policies of their workplace.*

Examples for HCW who tested negative for COVID-19: Legend - 10-day period 14-day period Other

- If symptoms resolve on Day 5, HCW can return to work.



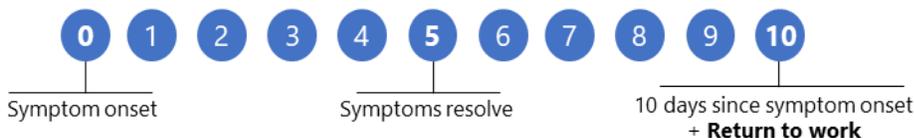
If HCW was **NOT** tested for COVID-19, the following conditions should be fulfilled prior to return to work:

- Resolution of symptoms (including resolution of fever without use of fever-reducing medication) other than residual cough; **AND**
- Minimum of 10 days have passed since the onset of the first symptom.

Because it is unknown whether the HCW has COVID-19 or an illness with similar symptoms, such as a common cold or an influenza-like illness, it is important that they self-isolate for the 10-day period as a precaution or, if feasible, get tested and follow the appropriate recommendation. *If the HCW has an alternate diagnosis or symptoms indicating they are sick with another illness, the return to work recommendation should be based on that diagnosis and the relevant occupational health policies of their workplace.*

For example:

- Even if symptoms have resolved earlier, HCW may only return to work once it has been 10 days since the onset of symptoms, unless they are able to get tested.



Self-Isolation for Staff with Travel History Outside Canada

Some HCWs may have been asked to complete a 14-day mandatory self-isolation period **prior to developing symptoms** due to travel outside of Canada. Essential workers may be exempt from this requirement, as defined in the [Order by the Provincial Health Officer on Travellers and Employers](#).

For HCW travellers that developed symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19, they must follow the criteria for positive confirmed COVID-19 cases recommended above.

For HCW travellers that tested negative for COVID-19, they must continue to self-isolate until their symptoms resolve AND a minimum of 14 days have passed since they arrived back in Canada.

For HCW travellers that were not tested for COVID-19, they must continue to self-isolate until their symptoms resolve AND a minimum of 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms AND a minimum of 14 days have passed since they arrived back in Canada, whichever is longer.

In other words, staff that were not tested or tested negative are still required to complete their mandatory 14-day self-isolation, even if their symptoms resolve earlier.

For example:

Legend - 10-day period 14-day period Other

- If HCW tested negative, they must complete their 14-day self-isolation prior to returning to work, even if symptoms have resolved earlier.



- If HCW tested negative or was not tested, they must continue to self-isolate until their symptoms have resolved, even if their 14-day self-isolation period ends earlier.



- If HCW was not tested, they must complete their 14-day self-isolation prior to returning to work, even if symptoms have resolved earlier and 10 days have passed.



Earlier Return to Work to Maintain Base Staffing Levels

Health care operational leads might determine that the aforementioned return to work approaches cannot be followed due to the need to support base staffing requirements. In such scenarios:

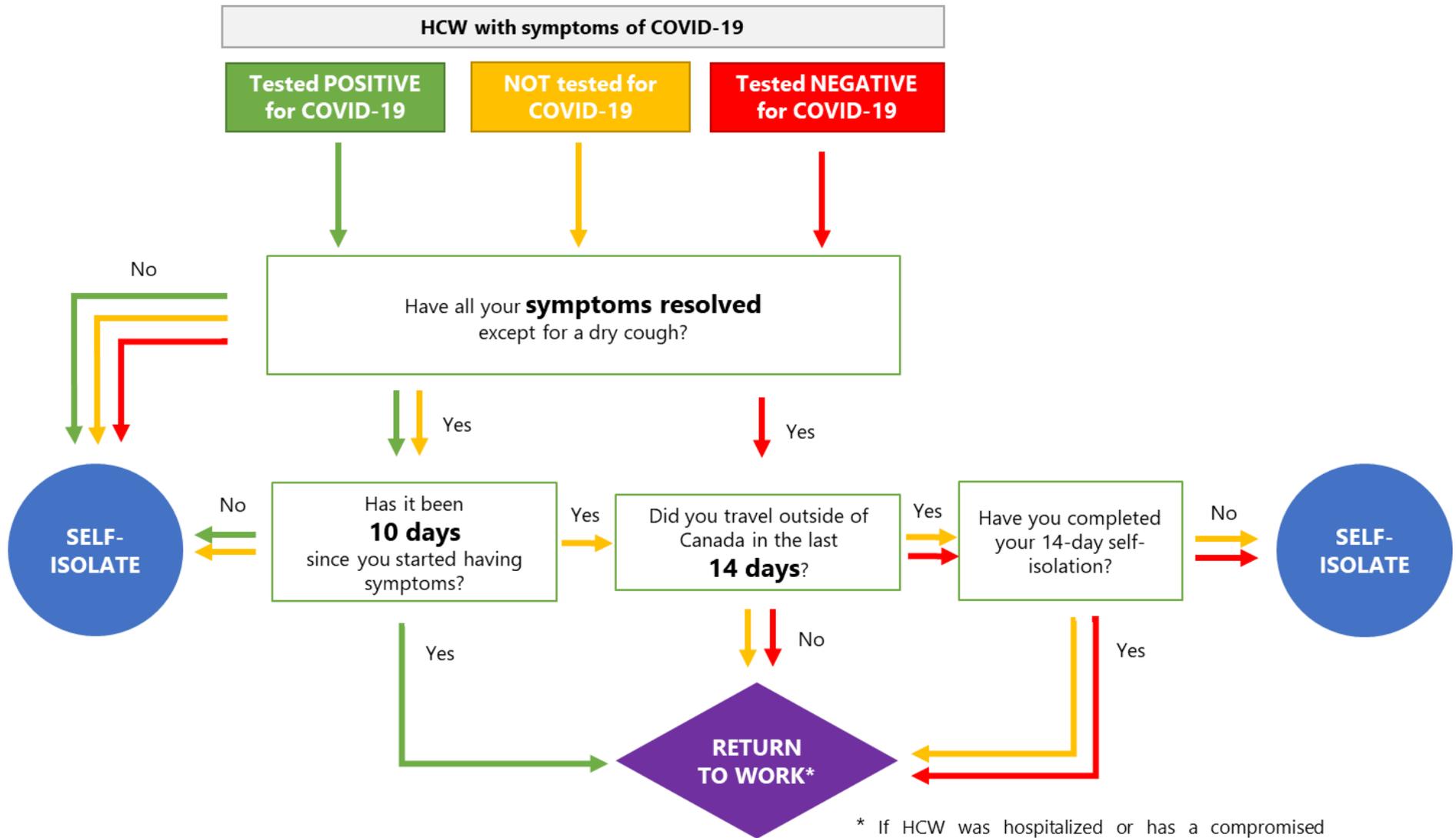
- HCW should be evaluated by the MHO and WHS to determine appropriateness of earlier return to work than recommended. This evaluation should consider all the factors listed above and keep in mind that HCW should not be working while sick.
- If HCW returns to work **earlier than recommended above**, they must adhere to the Additional Precautions recommended below.

Additional Precautions

If returning to work earlier than recommended, HCWs should:

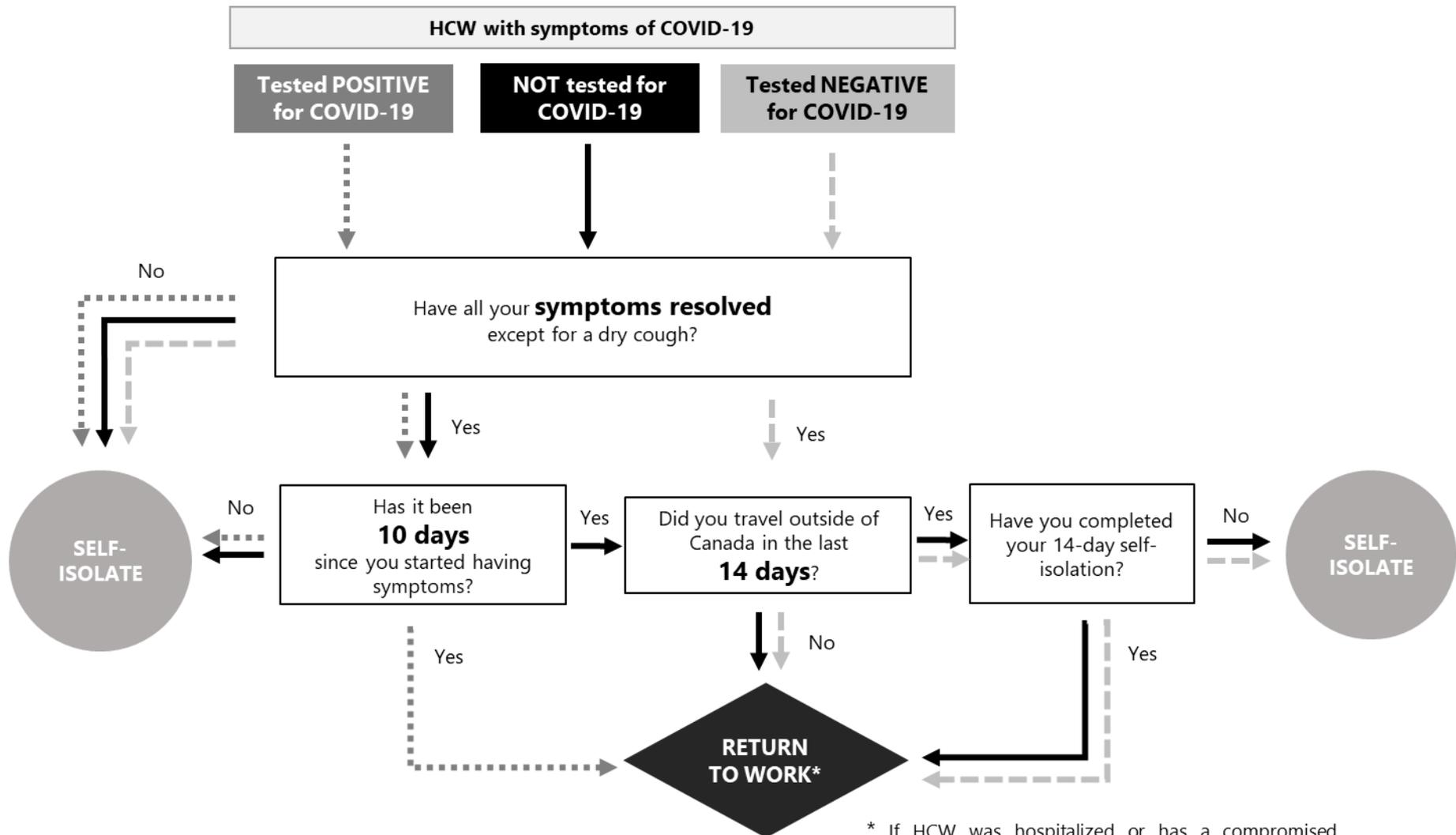
- Wear a surgical mask at all times and in all areas of the workplace, and other PPE as per the [COVID-19 PPE Allocation Framework](#). The mask can be put on at the beginning of the shift and can be worn throughout the entire shift unless it becomes wet, damaged, or soiled or when leaving the unit. Note that if taken off, masks should be discarded and not re-worn.
- If the routine work environment does not require PPE, wear a surgical mask at all times and in all areas of the workplace until 14 days after last known exposure.
- Be restricted from contact with severely immunocompromised patients (e.g., transplant, hematology-oncology) until 14 days after last known exposure.
- Adhere diligently to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette (e.g., cover nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, dispose of tissues in waste receptacles, wash hands right away) and other infection prevention and control measures of your workplace.
- Avoid standard greetings that require physical contact, such as shaking hands.
- To the extent practical, reduce close contact with other HCW by maintaining a 2 metre separation and avoid shared spaces.
- Avoid close contact with others when travelling to and from work and between shifts.
- Avoid any unnecessary visits to public establishments.
- Self-isolate at home on days when you are not required at the workplace.
- If HCW has travelled, follow all of the recommended procedures provided by an information and support officer including procedures issued by the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control.
- Continue to self-monitor daily for signs and symptoms of illness.
- If symptoms re-appear or worsen during work, inform your supervisor to arrange for a replacement, safely transfer essential care as soon as possible, go home directly to self-isolate, and seek a re-evaluation from WHS.
- Follow any additional institutional policies or guidance.

Appendix A - BC Health Care Worker Return to Work Decision Tree



* If HCW was hospitalized or has a compromised immune system, they may also require 2 negative NP swabs prior to returning to work. Essential staff may return to work earlier once symptoms have resolved, in consultation with the MHO.

BC Health Care Worker Return to Work Decision Tree - B&W Print Version



* If HCW was hospitalized or has a compromised immune system, they may also require 2 negative NP swabs prior to returning to work. Essential staff may return to work earlier once symptoms have resolved, in consultation with the MHO.