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A Guide to Testing, Quarantining and Isolating with COVID-19

Liberty, NY – The Disease Control (Epidemiology) team at Sullivan County Public Health Services is urging local residents who have come into close contact with someone who has COVID-19 to quarantine for the recommended 14 days.

The renewed urgency comes as cases of the disease caused by the novel coronavirus have spiked sharply both locally and Statewide. At the start of this week, 25 new positive cases were reported, up from 100 active cases on Friday, Nov. 13, and a significant increase from 35 active cases just over a month ago.

“This is indicative of an increase in communitywide transmission,” said Nancy McGraw, Public Health Director. “The best tools we have to contain additional outbreaks is prevention: consistent mask wearing, hand-washing or hand sanitizer use, limiting time in groups, and that people understand the importance of quarantine and isolation.”

When Should I Quarantine?

Quarantining keeps someone who has been exposed to the virus (and who might be contagious even without symptoms) from spreading it to others.

Quarantine is for people who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 and requires staying at home for at least 14 days while monitoring symptoms. During this period, an individual could develop an active infection and become contagious. The average incubation period is 5 to 7 days, but it could take up to 14 days.

A “close contact” means that you were within six feet of a COVID-19 positive patient for more

than 15 minutes, provided care to someone with COVID-19, had direct physical contact, shared utensils or cups, or were directly sneezed or coughed on by someone diagnosed with COVID-19.

If you become symptomatic and get tested, you should quarantine until those results come back. That includes if you have had a rapid COVID-19 test and a PCR. Individuals must wait for BOTH results to come back prior to resuming normal activities.

“A negative rapid test does not mean you are cleared,” noted McGraw. “Both tests must come back negative.”

When Should I Isolate?

Isolation is for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and requires people to stay in their homes for at least 10 days while monitoring symptoms.

“People in quarantine should stay home, separate themselves from others, and monitor their health,” said McGraw. “Please note that if you get tested during quarantine, you will still need to complete the full period even with a negative COVID test result.”

What About Testing?

There are two types of tests for COVID-19. Viral tests tell you if you have a current infection, and antibody tests tell you if you’ve been previously infected.

Antibody tests should not be used to diagnose a current COVID-19 infection. An antibody test may not show if you have a current COVID-19 infection because it can take 1–3 weeks after infection for your body to make antibodies.

“It is a ‘snapshot’ in time and will not give you lasting immunity to COVID-19 either, which many people falsely believe is true,” McGraw advised. “We do not know how much protection (immunity) antibodies to the virus might provide against getting infected again. Confirmed and suspected cases of reinfection have been reported, although not common. In general, these tests aren’t reliable enough for individuals to act based on the results.”

“An analysis of publicly available data on infections from the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, that causes the respiratory illness COVID-19 yielded an estimate of 5.1 days for the median disease incubation period, according to a new study led by researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. This median time from exposure to onset of symptoms suggests that the 14-day quarantine period used by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for individuals with likely exposure to the coronavirus continues to the most

predictable.” (Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2020, March 10).

Source: Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. (2020, March 10). New study on COVID-19 estimates 5.1 days for incubation period: Median time from exposure to symptoms affirms earlier estimates and supports CDC's current 14-day quarantine period. Science Daily. Retrieved November 16, 2020 from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/03/200310164744.htm