

# Scientific Brief » Post-Exposure Isolation Period for Covid-19

The incubation period for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, is 14 days. This is the amount of time after an exposure that it can take for an infection to develop.

While the average incubation period is approximately four to five days, this is not an appropriate measure to use to determine the post-exposure isolation period. If the *average* incubation period is used to establish post-exposure isolation time periods, a significant proportion of cases will become infectious after that timeframe.

For public health and occupational health protection, it is necessary to use the *range* of incubation periods to ensure the timeframe effectively includes the majority of individuals. Research indicates the range of incubation period is approximately from one to 14 days.<sup>1,2</sup>

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently posted “alternatives” to shorten the 14-day post-exposure isolation period.<sup>3</sup> In this guidance, the CDC explicitly recognizes that a post-exposure period shorter than 14 days will miss cases: “Any option to shorten quarantine risks being less effective than the currently recommended 14-day quarantine.”

## If a nurse or health care worker is exposed to Covid-19

Exposure to Covid-19 means contact with a suspected or confirmed Covid-19 patient without full personal protective equipment:

- ✓ Respirator at least as protective as an N95
- ✓ Eye protection
- ✓ Isolation gown or coveralls that are at least fluid resistant
- ✓ Medical-grade gloves

Then the nurse or health care worker should be placed on paid precautionary leave for 14 days.

At the end of the 14 days, they should be tested using a reliable diagnostic test at the employer’s expense.

1 Yan, Lin, Jingyi Dai, et al., “Estimation of incubation period and serial interval of COVID-19: analysis of 178 cases and 131 transmission chains in Hubei province, China,” *Epidem & Infect*, June 19, 2020.

2 Tan, W.Y.T., L.Y. Wong, et al., “Does incubation period of COVID-19 vary with age? A study of epidemiologically linked cases in Singapore,” *Epidem & Infect*, Sept 2, 2020.

3 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Options to Reduce Quarantine for Contacts of Persons with SARS-CoV-2 Infection Using Symptom Monitoring and Diagnostic Testing,” Dec 2, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html>.