

What are the implications for a general practice or other primary health care organisation if a team member tests positive for COVID-19?

Answer provided (with thanks) by the Queensland Public Health Incident Management Team (IMT) on 2 April 2020

Only persons who are close contacts would need to be quarantined from the workplace, and this would be determined when contact tracing is undertaken by the local public health unit.

There may be a recommendation to close the practice for a short period of time if contact tracing is likely to be extensive, but I think this would be the exception rather than the rule.

Part of the concern is that if there is a case in a workplace, then the business will automatically be shut down. This is certainly not the case, and there are things businesses can do now to mitigate the risk of number of staff being close contacts. We suggest the following:

The purpose of contact tracing

When a person is confirmed as having COVID-19 infection, Public Health Units undertake contact tracing. This involves identifying people who have had any sort of contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19 infection and sorting them according to risk. The aim is to identify people who have had **close contact** with the infected person and direct them into quarantine to prevent further spread. People who are not close contacts do not have to go into quarantine, but should be alert to the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 and monitor their health, continuing to practice recommended social distancing and hygiene measures.

How are contacts categorised, and who must go into quarantine?

A person with confirmed COVID-19 infection is considered infectious from 24 hours before the onset of symptoms until at least 10 days after. Public Health Units will determine the dates during which the person with the infection may have passed infection to others.

A close contact is a person who has, during the period that the infected person is considered infectious:

- had greater than 15 minutes face to face contact with the infected person in any setting
- OR
- shared a closed space with the infected person for a total of more than 2 hours. A closed space includes a home, the same room in an office, venues such as indoor dining areas and enclosed venues. Areas that would not be considered closed spaces include: well-ventilated areas without walls or with partial walls and good airflow; pathways; semi-open or open loading areas and roadways.

The period of quarantine is 14 days from the last contact with the infected person. This is based on the longest known incubation period. If a person in quarantine has a negative test during the period of quarantine, they still need to complete the period of quarantine, as they may become positive in following days.

How can employers in the industry work now to minimise the number of people in their business who might be categorised as close contacts, should a person in the workplace be confirmed as having infection?

Employers may be able to implement strategies to minimise close contact in their workplaces, for example:

- Ensure consistent social distancing and good hand hygiene in the workplace
- Increase cleaning of common hard surfaces and touch points such as door handles, equipment
- Ensure people who develop acute respiratory infection (fever, cough, sore throat etc) are excluded from the workplace. The longer a person with acute respiratory infection remains in the workplace, the longer they may have close contact with other workers.
- Risk assess close office areas. Encourage working from home where possible. Consider physically separating staff as much as possible in the work place and consider dividing office staff into teams working in separate office areas, to reduce the likelihood that all office staff could become close contacts.

Also:

- Where possible, ensure staff who return from travel adhere to quarantine requirements
- encourage staff to comply with social distancing directives and recommendations for the community, from government.

Workers who work in open spaces (e.g. outdoors, or in well ventilated large covered areas without walls) and who practice social distancing (i.e. remain 1.5m from other people) are unlikely to meet the definition of close contact.

Quarantine

- Co-workers who are close contacts of a confirmed positive case of Covid-19 will be required to go into quarantine for 14 days.
- During quarantine, if they develop any symptoms they should get assessed and tested if appropriate for COVID-19 (this can be arranged by their GPs or at a Fever clinic).
- While waiting for test results they have to remain isolation.
- If their test for COVID-19 comes back negative they are required complete the rest of their quarantine period.
- However, if they are confirmed to have COVID-19 they are required to remain in isolation.
- A Confirmed or probable cases with mild illness who did not require hospitalisation can be released from isolation if they meet all of the following criteria:
 - o at least 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms; and
 - o there has been resolution of all symptoms of the acute illness for the previous 72 hours¹
- The case should be advised to continue to be diligent to hand hygiene and cough etiquette and practice social distancing, as is indicated for the rest of the community, as this will assist in reducing transmission.

Quarantine – for contacts who are asymptomatic and COVID-19 negative

Isolation – for people who are symptomatic or suspected to have/or have COVID-19