

CDC Updates COVID-19 Guidance, Urges Universal Face Masking And Reduces Quarantine Period to 7-10 Days

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The CDC has issued two significant pieces of COVID-19 guidance in the last few days. On December 4, 2020, the CDC issued guidance recommending universal face masking while indoors and outdoors when social distancing is not possible. Except for their homes, the CDC is now recommending that persons wear cloth face masks at all times when indoors, even when social distancing is possible. This is the first time that the CDC has recommended universal face masking.

This latest guidance comes two days after the CDC updated prior guidance by reducing the quarantine period from 14 days to 7-10 days. For nearly the entire pandemic, the CDC and other public health officials have consistently recommended that persons with possible exposure to COVID-19 quarantine for 14 days. The CDC's new guidance provides two additional options instead of a 14-day quarantine, depending on whether the person takes a COVID-19 test. One option is that a person need to quarantine for only 10 days after exposure without a taking a test. A second option is that a person need to quarantine for only 7 days after exposure, if they test negative for COVID-19. The reason for the updated guidance is more practical than a significant change in the science. In updating its guidance, the CDC explained, "Reducing the length of quarantine may make it easier for people to quarantine by reducing economic hardship if they cannot work during this time." The CDC also explained that a shorter quarantine period can lessen the impact on the public health system.

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These additional options, however, do not replace the existing 14-day quarantine recommendation. In fact, the CDC continues to endorse a 14-day quarantine. It is important to remember that the CDC only provides guidance. Employers can continue to require a 14-day quarantine, and, of course, must follow state and local public health requirements on how long a person should quarantine. As of today, the Illinois Department of Public Health has not adopted the CDC's guidance and still requires a 14-day quarantine after possible exposure to COVID-19.