

Dear colleagues

Thank you for your ongoing contributions to the COVID-19 response, and the important role you play in supporting your patients and communities through these challenges.

Further to my letters in December 2021, I would like to update you regarding several important changes to the management of COVID-19.

Changes to the Self-Isolation Period for People with COVID-19

Patients with COVID-19 may release themselves from isolation if at least **7 days** (previously 10 days) have passed since the date of their positive test and they have not had respiratory symptoms of COVID-19 during the last 24 hours of their isolation period.

If they have other non-respiratory symptoms after the end of their isolation period, they should connect with their GP and a cause other than COVID-19 should also be considered, e.g. persistent fever.

Change in De-isolation Notification

Patients will receive an SMS from NSW Health following a positive result telling them what day they can leave isolation if they do not have respiratory symptoms. The patient is advised that the release date is no longer valid if they are admitted to hospital or special health accommodation. They do not have to wait for the official notification from NSW Health if they meet all the de-isolation requirements on day 7. We do not recommend routine COVID-19 testing of recovered patients at their release from isolation.

Patients are advised to wear a mask when interacting with other people and to avoid high-risk settings (healthcare, aged care, disability care and correctional facilities), where possible, for an additional 3 days after completing their self-isolation period.

For more information please see the [Testing positive to COVID-19](#) factsheet.

Changes to Exposure Risk Assessment

Changes have occurred to increase the focus on high-risk exposures, such as households.

Any person who resides in the same house as a COVID-positive person must isolate for 7 days from the last time they were in contact with the COVID-positive person. Other contacts of a COVID-positive person should consider their own risk and circumstances using the [Information for people exposed to COVID-19](#) factsheet. Exemptions are in place for certain critical workers, if the risk of household contacts returning to the workplace is appropriately managed.

Testing for COVID-19

Due to significant demand, PCR testing should be prioritised for those people for whom a PCR-confirmed diagnosis will significantly change the management of the individual or the environment that they work in (e.g. to meet the eligibility requirements for specific therapeutic interventions).

PCR testing is not recommended for returned international travellers, for surveillance testing, or for contacts of people with COVID-19. People with symptoms should seek rapid antigen testing in the first instance. If this is not available, they should be advised to have a PCR test.

People who test positive on a rapid antigen test should be managed as confirmed COVID-19 cases in the following circumstances:

- Where they have symptoms consistent with COVID-19
- Where they have had a moderate or high-risk exposure to someone with COVID-19 (regardless of symptoms)
- Where they have travelled internationally within the last 14 days.

People who test positive on a rapid antigen test but are asymptomatic and do not have a moderate or high-risk exposure or recent international travel are advised to have another rapid antigen test 24-hours after their first positive result or a PCR test. They should self-isolate until their second test returns a negative result and respiratory symptoms resolve. If the second test is positive, they should be managed as a positive case.

A GP can request PCR testing where it will assist with managing a patient's clinical care. Where someone may benefit from therapeutic interventions it is important that care is not delayed by lack of access to timely PCR. A positive RAT result is sufficient for consideration of early therapeutic intervention. Please escalate such cases to the NSW Health COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line (number below). This service can assist with access to NSW Health pathways for therapeutic interventions. Please refer to your local HealthPathways for eligibility criteria.

People considered at high risk of severe disease include those who are:

- Pregnant women
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (particularly those with underlying health conditions)
- Pacific Islander people
- Unvaccinated (16 years and over)
- Immunosuppressed

Service NSW RAT Self-reporting

Members of the NSW community are now mandated to report their positive rapid antigen test through the Service NSW app or website. This will link them to clinical supports and provide evidence for access to welfare and other support payments. It is important they enter their personal information accurately.

High-risk patients, in particular, presenting to a GP after a positive RAT result should be encouraged to report their results on the Service NSW app or website in order to receive the screening tool and guidance on accessing support. If the GP has concerns that the high-risk patient will not be able to navigate the Service NSW notification system, the GP can escalate the case through the NSW Health COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line.

For more information, please see the [Getting tested for COVID-19](#) factsheet.

Clinical Support for General Practitioners

The NSW Health COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line (1800 960 933) now includes an Interactive Voice Recording menu option specifically for GPs, allowing calls from GPs to be prioritised for timely access to COVID-19 resources, advice and support. Additionally, the My Emergency Doctor service provides clinical guidance for GPs on management of more complex or high-risk patients with a Fellow of the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine (FACEM) through the NSW Care at Home Support

Line (1800 960 933) during business hours and through the National Coronavirus Helpline (1800 020 080) after hours.

People re-exposed to COVID-19 within 28 days of recovery from COVID-19

People with recent COVID-19 who have had a high-risk exposure (e.g. household contact) within 28 days of their release from isolation are not considered to be at risk of re-infection and do not need to undertake 7 days of self-isolation.

Thank you again for your important support to patients and communities during this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Chant'.

Dr Kerry Chant PSM
Chief Health Officer and Deputy Secretary
Population and Public Health

13 January 2022