"How Long Should I Require Employees To Quarantine or Isolate, and What is the Difference?"

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Keeping up with COVID guidance can be confusing and difficult. The CDC has revised its recommendations for quarantining after exposure to someone infected with COVID-19. As a reminder, **quarantine** is used when an individual has been exposed or in close contact to a person with a COVID infection and is not experiencing symptoms, or has initially tested negative for infection. **Isolation** refers to a period of time that an individual remains separated from others because they are either symptomatic or have tested positive for the virus.

THE CDC recommendation remains at 14 days for **quarantine;** however, based on "local circumstances and resources," the quarantine period can be shortened to 10 days without testing and if no symptoms develop; or 7 days if the individual has tested negative and remains symptom free. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html The CDC recommendation for **isolation** is that it usually can be discontinued 10 days after symptom onset and the individual must be fever free for 24 hours and symptoms must be improved. Isolation may be discontinued for those who have tested positive, but never developed symptoms, 10 days after the first positive test. For those with severe illness, however, isolation should be continued for 20 days after symptom onset or longer upon the advice of an infection control expert. See https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/duration-isolation.html

Employers should be cautious before shortening quarantine or isolation periods and should check with state and local health agencies as recommendations may vary. The New Jersey Department of Health is still recommending 14 days of quarantine after close contact with someone who has COVID-19 and to stay away from others who are at higher risk for COVID-19 complications. See: https://covid19.nj.gov/faqs/coronavirus-information/slowing-the-spread/can-someone-who-has-been-quarantined-for-covid-19-spread-the-illness-to-others.