

Return to Work Guidance

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) outlines two strategies for returning to work. The symptom-based (non-test based) strategy is what Dallas County currently recommends for non-health care workers. Adoption of this recommendation is based on increasing evidence that even though tests might continue to detect the virus that causes the disease COVID-19, after more than 9 days after the onset of illness, viable virus has not been successfully cultured. Additionally, the CDC reports that the statistically estimated likelihood of recovering viable virus approaches zero by 10 days (CDC unpublished data, Wölfel 2020, Arons 2020).

To further this recommendation, Dallas County has instituted an Order which bans employers outside health care settings from requiring a negative COVID-19 test in order for an employee to return to work. This strategy is put in place to protect employees and allows you to maintain a strong work force during this critical time.

This section of the order reads as follows:

“c. Employers shall not implement any rules making a negative COVID-19 test or a note from a healthcare provider a requirement before a COVID-19 recovered employee can return to work. This provision does not apply to hospitals or healthcare workers following the CDC’s test-based strategy for return to work criteria for healthcare personnel with confirmed COVID-19.”

The complete order may be found here: <https://www.dallascounty.org/Assets/uploads/docs/covid-19/orders-media/061620-Amended-SupplementalOrderonContinuingRequirements.pdf>

The CDC symptom-based (non-test based) strategy includes the following:

- 3 days with no fever **and**
- Respiratory symptoms have improved (e.g. cough, shortness of breath) **and**
- 10 days since symptoms first appeared

For example, if an employee becomes symptomatic on June 10 and their fever and symptoms have resolved by June 17, they would be fine to return to on June 20. If their fever and symptoms didn’t resolve until June 19, they would be fine to return on June 22.

This strategy can apply to most recovered persons, however, the CDC recognizes there are some special circumstances (involving highly vulnerable patients or other situations) that need additional consideration. In such circumstances, employers and local public health authorities may choose to apply more stringent recommendations, such as a test-based strategy, if feasible, or a requirement for a longer period of isolation after illness resolution.

Additional References:

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fprevent-getting-sick%2Fwhen-its-safe.html

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/strategy-discontinue-isolation.html>