Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
You've tested POSITIVE for COVID-19 (coronavirus). Now what?

WHAT TYPES OF COVID TESTS ARE THERE?

There are two main types of tests to see if you have COVID – antigen tests and PCR tests. Both are done with swabs – usually in your nose, but sometimes in your throat or both your nose and throat. If you do the test yourself, it's usually an antigen test. If you have the test done by a healthcare provider or at a COVID testing site in the city, it's most often a PCR test. The tests are slightly different and there are small chances of a "false positive," which means that a test result says positive when it is actually negative. A positive test using either type of test should be treated like a true positive infection.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY TEST IS POSITIVE?

If you do a home antigen test yourself, you should carefully follow the instructions that come with the test kit for performing the test and for reading the result.

If your test is a PCR test (usually done at testing sites) you will get a report that says either "positive or negative" or "detected or not detected." A report that says "positive" or "detected" means that the COVID virus was found in that swab. This is a positive COVID test.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I TEST POSITIVE?

You should tell your medical provider right away if you have a positive test. Don't assume they will find out – especially if you do the test at home or at a pharmacy or at a testing site. Your provider will be able to answer any questions and help with management of your symptoms.

Most people who test positive for COVID get completely better at home without needing further medical care.

Protect other people in your community by staying home (called "isolation"):
- Don't go to work, school, or meetings
- Avoid public transportation (including buses, trains, taxis, or ride shares)
- Don't have people come to your home who don't need to be there
- Don't come to a medical facility unless directed by your doctor or for emergency medical care.
- Ask a healthy individual to pick up your medications at the pharmacy if needed, or request to have them sent to you by mail.

WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF COVID?

COVID-19 symptoms include fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, cough, shortness of breath, chest pain, loss of appetite, and loss of sense of smell/taste. Symptoms can be severe or mild, like a common cold. Some people don't even notice any symptoms from COVID. Symptoms can go away in a couple of days or last up to a few weeks – or anything in between. This is normal. Most people who test positive for COVID get completely better at home without needing further medical care.

HOW DO I TREAT MY SYMPTOMS?

You should follow these general instructions to help you recover from COVID:
- Get plenty of rest
- Drink plenty of water and other fluids
- Use over-the-counter medication as needed. These medicines treat your symptoms, but don't treat the COVID virus itself. The usual cough, cold and flu medications that you can buy at a drug store or supermarket can help with your symptoms. If you have questions about whether these are OK for you to take, you should check with your medical provider

There are [medicines available by prescription that treat the COVID](#) virus directly. These are used in certain people and certain situations where there is a high risk for COVID complications. Check with your medical provider if you would like to know if these medicines could be helpful in your case.

HOW LONG DO I NEED TO ISOLATE?

10 days of isolation is the standard isolation period. The day that symptoms start (or the day you have a positive test, if you don't have any symptoms) is Day 0.   Then isolation is for 10 full days after that.

In certain situations, you can end isolation sooner, but everyone needs to isolate for at least 5 days.

It is safe to end isolation early with both of the following are true:

> 1) You do not have symptoms, or your symptoms have improved (including no fever for at least 24 hours)

> AND

> 2) You have a negative antigen test anytime between Day 6 and 10.

As soon as both of those criteria are met, you can safely end isolation. However, you should still use [masks](#) 100% of the time when around other people and do not travel for the full 10 days. If you don't meet both criteria – including if you're not able to get a home antigen test – just continue isolation until Day 10 is over or until you meet both criteria above.

If it's been more than 10 days and you feel better, you don't need to test again to end isolation. You're done.

A positive test can stay positive for a long time, even after the infection is gone – especially PCR tests. Once you're done with isolation, you shouldn't have another COVID PCR test for at least 90 days unless a medical provider tells you to.

If you need help with isolation, call the San Francisco Department of Public Health COVID Resource Center at (628) 217-6101 and leave a message to get help, including setting up a space where you can isolate or quarantine, arranging for food delivery and cleaning supplies, and mental health support.   Phone calls are returned within 24 hours Monday-Friday.

WHAT SHOULD I WATCH FOR AFTER I TEST POSITIVE or AFTER I DEVELOP A COVID-19 INFECTION?

If you have difficulty breathing or a fever, you can monitor your symptoms using these devices which you can get from a drug store or online:
- Thermometer. Use a thermometer to check for fever. If your temperature is over 100.4°F you can take fever-lowering medicines to bring it down. These medicines include acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). You should tell your health care provider if you have a fever that won't come down with these medicines.
- Pulse Oximeter. A pulse oximeter is a small clip that goes on one finger and measures the oxygen level in your blood. You can purchase one for around $20 online or at many pharmacies. To get the most accurate reading, make sure your fingers or toes are warm and avoid dark nail polish. A normal reading is 95% or higher. If your reading stays below 94%, you should tell your medical provider.

Please continue to monitor your symptoms. If you need follow-up care or your symptoms worsen, tell your primary care provider. If you feel your condition is an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. In either case, let emergency or medical staff know about your positive COVID-19 test.

HOW DOES HIV AFFECT COVID?

People living with HIV (PLWH) may be more likely to get COVID and may have more COVID symptoms. This is mainly true for PLWH who are not on medications to treat HIV or who have more advanced HIV infection (CD4 "T cell" count below 200, detectable viral load, or an infection related to HIV). PLWH may also be older or have other medical conditions that put them at risk for COVID.

COVID vaccines and COVID treatments are safe for people with HIV to take.

CAN I STILL GET A COVID VACCINE AFTER I'VE HAD COVID?

YES! Having COVID can provide some protection against another COVID infection, but people can definitely get COVID again. Getting a COVID vaccine will give you even more protection against having another COVID infection. If you haven't had a COVID vaccine or are due for a booster, you can get it as soon as you are done with your isolation period – there's no need to wait. If you're not sure if you're due for COVID vaccine, check with your provider.

Click HERE to find COVID vaccine sites in San Francisco.

WHAT SHOULD MY CLOSE CONTACTS DO?

Please encourage anyone you've had recent close contact with to get tested themselves, even if they feel Ok and don't have symptoms.

Follow these additional instructions:

- Contacts who are not fully vaccinated should quarantine for a minimum of 10 days after close contact exposure and get tested 3 to 5 days after last exposure or right away if symptoms develop during quarantine. A mask should be worn for 10 days following exposure regardless of test result.

- Contacts who are fully vaccinated don't need to quarantine but should get tested 3 to 5 days after exposure, even if there aren't symptoms. A mask should be worn indoors in public for 14 days following exposure or until the test result is negative. If symptoms develop during those 14 days, isolate and get tested right away.

Unvaccinated household members who can't isolate from you at home may need to stay at home for an even longer period of time. They'll need to stay at home for the entire time you may be contagious (your isolation period) plus an additional 10 days. This means they may need to stay home away from others for up to 20 days. This is because it can take up to 10 days for symptoms to appear, and the count starts on the last day they were exposed to someone who was still contagious, such as you.

Minimize contact with others in your home:
- Separate yourself from household contacts. If possible, stay in a room away from them, especially if they're age 60 or older, pregnant, have weakened immune systems or other medical problems. Use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- Wear a mask if you must be around other household members.
- Avoid contact with newborns.
- Avoid sharing personal household items, like glasses, utensils, towels, and bedding. Wash items thoroughly.
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, and nose as much as possible.
- Clean your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Clean shared surfaces frequently, including counters, doorknobs/handles, light switches, phones, and remotes.

Consider having others pick up necessities for you or use delivery services if possible. If you must go to the store for food or supplies, please wear a mask and stay at least 6 feet from others whenever possible (social distancing).

If your contacts need help with quarantine, call the San Francisco Department of Public Health COVID Resource Center at (628) 217-6101 and leave a message to get help, including setting up a space where you can isolate or quarantine, arranging for food delivery and cleaning supplies, and mental health support.   Phone calls are returned within 24 hours Monday-Friday.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

You can get general information from the CDC website here:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

Information on Quarantine and Isolation here:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html

Information on Self-Testing here:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/testing/self-testing.html

Frequently Asked Questions here:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html

Information about Caring for Someone with COVID at Home here:
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/care-for-someone.html

For help with the emotional effects of COVID, please call your own medical provider or the Community Behavioral Health Services Helpline at the San Francisco Department of Public Health:
24-Hour Access Helpline: (415) 255-3737 or (888) 246-3333
TDD (888) 484-7200