May 22, 2020

ADH requires a person exposed to COVID-19 to complete a 14-day quarantine period, even though they may have a negative test result during the quarantine period.

Quarantine of persons known to be exposed to someone with COVID-19 is a key strategy to stopping the spread of the illness. A person who is a close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 must self-quarantine (remain home) for 14 days after the date of their last exposure to the positive case. Arkansas Department of Health staff will work closely with a contact to provide them with guidance and monitor their health.

It is important to understand that a negative COVID-19 test for a person who is a contact does not change the requirement for them to complete the 14-day quarantine. The 14-day period allows for adequate time to monitor for the development of symptoms during the full incubation period of the virus. A negative test in an exposed person during this period may be a false negative, as the virus may have been present but not yet at detectable levels. Asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic persons have been shown to contribute to the transmission of COVID-19, so ending the 14-day quarantine early puts others at risk.

Therefore, a negative COVID-19 test during a person's 14-day quarantine does not provide an early or total release from quarantine. All persons must complete a full 14-day self-quarantine when they have been exposed to a known case. Please share widely with your staff, especially those who provide COVID-19 results to patients.

Note on Exposed Critical Infrastructure Workers: Critical infrastructure workers may be permitted to continue work following potential exposure to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), provided they remain asymptomatic, have not had a positive test result for COVID-19, and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community, including wearing a face covering, physical distancing, and daily screening for fever or symptoms. See CDC’s full recommendations here. Please note that the exceptions made for critical infrastructure workers only apply to their work. They must remain in strict home quarantine for all time NOT spent at work. For a list of Critical Infrastructure Workers, click here.

To sign up for the Health Alert Network (HAN) and receive urgent updates from ADH regarding health crises or emerging issues, click here.