

TO: ALL SMS MEMBERS/ CHIEF DIRECTORATES / DIRECTORATES / REGIONAL / DISTRICT OFFICES,
SUB-STRUCTURES / ALL FACILITY MANAGERS/ CITY OF CAPE TOWN

CIRCULAR H 174 OF 2020 - COVID-19 ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE TIME PERIODS

Purpose

To update the COVID-19 Isolation and Quarantine time periods, based on new evidence around the duration of infectiousness of people with COVID-19 and the incubation time period for those who have been exposed to the coronavirus.

Background

The previously recommended time periods for both isolation (for those who have developed COVID-19) and quarantine (or those who have been exposed to the coronavirus), need to be updated, based on new evidence and the latest recommendations from the National Department of Health. The current policy is that patients with COVID-19 who have mild symptoms and those who are asymptomatic should isolate for 14 days. This policy was a precautionary one and was based on the scanty evidence at the time, which suggested that people with COVID-19 might remain infectious for an extended period.

New evidence has come to light that people infected with COVID-19 remain infectious and able to transmit the coronavirus for a shorter period of up to 9 days. Hence it would be prudent to extend the isolation period to just a little beyond that upper limit of infectiousness. For those with more severe illness the isolation period could then be longer, since they may remain infectious for longer. This could be accomplished by augmenting their acute illness hospital stay with a further period of isolation after they have commenced recovery.

Similarly, the incubation period for those exposed to the coronavirus could be reduced in line with new evidence around the incubation period. The median incubation period has been measured at 5-6 days, with a probable interquartile range of 3 to 9 days and a 90th percentile of approximately 10 days.

A list of quarantine time periods measured in various contexts is provided in *Appendix 1*. It is therefore deemed safe to quarantine those exposed for 10 days from the date of exposure, provided that they develop no symptoms during that time period. Those that develop symptoms need to be tested for coronavirus and if found positive should be isolated for 10 days. If they test negative then they can be released from quarantine at that point.

For scarce skilled workers, such as several categories of health care workers, it might become necessary to consider returning them to work earlier, if they remain asymptomatic while in quarantine. This could be accomplished by testing those who have remained asymptomatic at day 7, and if they are negative allowing them to return to work, while taking necessary

Infection Prevention Control precautions, including wearing a surgical mask. Those who test positive would have to go into isolation.

Policy Position

Isolation

Patients with various categories of Covid-19 should isolate for the time periods indicated:

1. Patients with mild disease (no oxygen required) should isolate for 10 days from the date of onset of symptoms.
2. Patients who remain asymptomatic throughout the illness, should isolate for 10 days from the date that the nasal/throat swab specimen was taken.
3. Patients who have severe illness requiring hospitalisation, should isolate for 10 days from the date that they no longer require oxygen.

Quarantine

Quarantine time periods are as follows:

1. Patients with high risk exposure should quarantine until they develop symptoms, at which point they should be PCR tested. Those that test negative can end their quarantine while those who test positive need to be isolated.
2. Patients with high risk exposure that remain asymptomatic can end their quarantine at day 10.
3. Health care workers who remain asymptomatic after high risk exposure, may voluntarily have a PCR test at day 7. Those that then test negative can end their quarantine, while those who test positive need to be isolated.

This policy replaces the Isolation and Quarantine time periods in the list of Circulars shown in *Appendix 2*.

Kind regards



Dr KEITH CLOETE

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: HEALTH

DATE: 03/09/2020

Appendix 1

Author (date)	Mean incubation period	Median incubation period	95% CI of the Median incubation period	Interquartile Range	Other measurements
Alsafayan et al. (June 2020)		6 days		7.5 days (reported as one estimate of spread)	
Aylward et al. (Feb 2020)	5-6 days				Range: 1-14 days
Guan et al. (April 2020)		4 days		2 to 7	
HIQA evidence summary (April 2020) [Review of 11 studies]	Range: 4.9 to 9 days				
Kong et al. (June 2020)		6.0 days		3.5 to 9.5	
Lai et al. (May 2020)	4.2 days		4.0 to 4.5		5 th percentile: 1.3 days 95 th percentile: 14.0 days
Lauer et al. (March 2020)		5.1 days	4.5 to 5.8		Symptom onset will occur within 11.5 days (CI, 8.2 to 15.6 days) for 97.5% of infected persons
Li et al. (March 2020)	5.2 days		4.1 to 7.0		95 th percentile: 12.5 days
Liao et al. (March 2020)	6.6 days		4.4 to 9.6		
Park et al. (March 2020) [Review of 8 studies]	Range: 4 to 6 days				
Tindale et al. (June 2020)	Singapore: 5.99 days Tianjin: 8.06 days	Singapore: 5.32 days Tianjin: 8.68 days	Singapore: 4.97 to 7.14 Tianjin: 7.72 to 9.7		
Tindale et al. (March 2020)	Singapore: 7.1 days Tianjin: 9 days		Singapore: 6.13 to 8.25		

Author (date)	Mean incubation period	Median incubation period	95% CI of the Median incubation period	Interquartile Range	Other measurements
			Tianjin: 7.92 to 10.2		
Wang et al. (May 2020)		6 days		3 to 9	
Yang et al. (June 2020)	5.4 days		4.8 to 6.0		2.5 th percentile: 1 day 97.5 th percentile: 15 days
Zhang et al. (April 2020)	5.2 days		1.8 to 12.4		
Zhang et al. (June 2020) [Meta-analysis of 12 studies]	5.35 days		4.29 to 6.42		
Zhao et al. (May 2020)		6 days		4 to 11	

Appendix 2

List of Circulars containing references to COVID-19 Isolation/Quarantine time periods prior to issuing of this circular and now replaced by the time periods as contained in this circular

CIRCULAR NUMBER	CIRCULAR TITLE
H 58 OF 2020	COVID-19 occupational health and safety (OHS) policy
H 63 OF 2020	Strategic framework for employee safety
H 67 OF 2020	Provincial palliative care position statement & plan for COVID-19 response
H 68 OF 2020	Health system strategy towards COVID-19
H 69 OF 2020	Primary health care preparedness for COVID-19 epidemic in Western Cape province
H 70 OF 2020	Preventing and managing coronavirus infection in the workplace
H 75 OF 2020	Policy for operationalisation of isolation and quarantine facilities
H 77 OF 2020	Guidelines for the prevention and management of coronavirus infection in healthcare facilities
H 79 OF 2020	Clinical guidelines: COVID-19 providing palliative care
H 83 OF 2020	COVID critical care triage and decision tool
H 84 OF 2020	COVID-19 guidance for professional health workers (nurses, doctors) in primary health care facilities
H 88 OF 2020	COVID-19 clinical guidelines for acute hospital admissions
H 89 OF 2020	COVID-19 guidance for health workers in primary health care facilities
H 99 OF 2020	The practical approach to care kit (PACK) - home
H 123 OF 2020	Guidelines for the prevention and management of COVID-19 infection at places of worship in the Western Cape
H 125 OF 2020	Guidance for health workers providing palliative and end-of-life care to COVID-19 patients in an inpatient setting
H 151 OF 2020	Updated COVID-19 guidance for managing adults in primary health care facilities
H 154 OF 2020	COVID-19 guidance for managing adults in an inpatient setting
H 155 OF 2020	Provincial COVID-19 response plan