UCI Health

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Concerns About Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Exposure

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Healthcare Workers

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1. I'm concerned about exposure to Coronavirus (COVID-19) – how does this virus spread?

The virus spreads through **direct contact with droplets** from the mouth or nose of a patient with coronavirus (e.g., coughing, sneezing, singing). It does not appear to spread through the air like tuberculosis, varicella (chicken pox), or measles can. For true exposure to COVID-19 to happen, you must:

- Directly breathe in droplets from a sick person OR
- Transfer contaminated secretions to your nose or mouth.

2. What is considered an exposure to a patient with COVID-19?

An exposure is when a healthcare worker sees a confirmed COVID-19 patient without the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) <u>and</u>:

- Masked patient coughs/sneezes within 3-6 feet **and** is you are NOT masked.
- Or, unmasked patient coughs/sneezes within 3-6 feet and you are NOT wearing mask/eye protection.
- You touch a patient's respiratory secretions and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth before you clean your hands.
- You perform an aerosol-generating procedure (e.g., intubation, bronchoscopy, CPR, open suctioning, nebulizer treatment, positive pressure ventilation) without an N95 mask.

3. What is <u>NOT</u> considered an exposure to a patient with COVID-19?

- UCI follows CDC guidance to determine risk of exposure and EIP recommendations for PPE are designed to minimize your risk.
- Brief or casual exposures, like talking to a patient at the check in desk or asking a patient a question from across a patient's room, are not considered a risk for getting COVID-19.
- With appropriate PPE, you are not considered at any higher risk for COVID-19 than normal community level activity.
- If the patient and healthcare provider were both wearing regular masks, risk of transmission is low and you are NOT considered exposed.
- If the patient is not masked, but the healthcare provider is wearing both a mask and eye protection, then transmission is low and you are NOT considered exposed.
- If an NP swab was done (e.g. for influenza or COVID-19 testing) and healthcare workers were wearing regular masks and eye protection (face shield or goggles) at the time, risk of transmission is low and you are NOT considered exposed.

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4. I think I was exposed to a patient with COVID-19. What should I do?

- On March 13, 2020, Orange County public health identified community spread of COVID-19 in our county.
- This means healthcare workers are now exposed to COVID-19 in routine community settings and our risk of getting the disease is equal or higher from our friends, family, and community because we interact with them in a much closer way.
- For this reason, an exposure at work no longer means work removal for an asymptomatic healthcare worker.
- Instead, any exposed healthcare workers should perform self-monitoring for 14 days from the time of their exposure and contact their supervisor and Occupational Health if any symptom develops at (714) 456-8300. If after hours or on weekends, call the hospital operator who will direct you to the COVID nurse triage line.
- Please see "*Monitoring Yourself For Infection Symptoms*" (COVID-19 SharePoint).

5. I took care of a patient who later tested positive for COVID-19. What do I do?

- First, determine if you have been exposed.
  - If you did not enter the room of the patient, or have direct contact with the patient, you are not exposed.
  - If you and the patient were masked during your encounter, you are not exposed.
  - If you were wearing both a mask and eye protection and performed hand hygiene when caring for the patient, then you are not exposed.
  - If you entered the room of a patient without PPE in the past 14 days, you may be exposed. You and any other exposed staff may continue to work as long as you remain asymptomatic. However, you must stay at home and disclose any cold or flu-like symptoms at the first moment they occur to prevent infecting those at work. Perform self-monitoring for 14 days from the last date of exposure and contact your supervisor and call Occupational Health if any symptom develops (714) 456-8300. See "*Monitoring Yourself For Infection Symptoms*" on the COVID-19 SharePoint.
- Coming in contact with an infected person **does NOT automatically mean you are infected or will be infected with the virus.** You need to monitor for the chance of infection.
- You cannot spread infection to others unless you are infected.
- You are not considered "infected" unless you actually develop symptoms. On average, it takes about 5 days (incubation period) to become sick with the virus, if you acquired it.
- **Droplet + Eye and Contact Precautions** should be used for all inpatients with possible infectious respiratory illness and **Two-Way Masking** should be used when assessing outpatients with respiratory complaints. This is to **protect you from exposure** should a patient later test positive for COVID-19.
- All healthcare workers are expected to follow the **Working Well Policy** (see Question 8).

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6. I was exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 patient – should I get tested?

- **Testing is appropriate if you have symptoms**. With few exceptions, asymptomatic individuals should not be tested. Part of the reason for this is that the incubation period for COVID-19 is 14 days. Thus, testing at one moment in time will not be able to provide any reassurance about whether the disease will surface at another time within the 14 day period. Thus, monitoring for symptoms is the best course of action.
- Any exposed healthcare workers should perform self-monitoring for 14 days from the time of their exposure and contact their supervisor and call Occupational Health if any symptoms develop. Occupational Health will evaluate the employee over the phone and determine when and how to perform testing, as well as when you are able to return to work.
- Please see and *"Monitoring Yourself For Infection Symptoms"* on the COVID-19 SharePoint.

7. What about asymptomatic spread? Can patients get sick from me and vice versa if one of us is exposed but asymptomatic?

- Like the flu, people who are asymptomatic can spread to others. Often these persons are actually pre-symptomatic, meaning that they will develop symptoms shortly, but were shedding virus before those symptoms began. However, **contagious spread is far greater from those who are symptomatic**.
- In the community, people who are asymptomatic can more easily spread to family members and loved ones because of the closeness of contact exchanged (e.g., sharing food, drink, coughing or sneezing in close proximity regularly, shared household surfaces.).
- In healthcare settings, if you are practicing strict hand hygiene, using appropriate PPE, practicing universal masking, and adhering to social distancing, you are unlikely to transmit infection to others, and they are unlikely to transmit to you.

8. In general, what should healthcare workers do if feeling sick at work?

- Anyone who develops signs or symptoms of COVID-19 at work, including the below should immediately call Occupational Health (or the hospital operator to access the COVID triage line after hours or on weekends) and inform their supervisor.

o Fever ≥ 99.0	o Loss of taste or smell
o Chills	o Headache
o New cough	o Diarrhea
o New shortness of breath	o Vomiting
o Muscle aches	o Nausea
o Unexpected fatigue	o Other cold symptoms
o Sore throat	

- Do not enter the room of an immunocompromised patient while sick.
- For all other illnesses, employees are expected to follow our **Working Well Policy**.

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9. I took care of a COVID-19 patient – is it safe to go home to my family or interact with coworkers?

- If you have worn all the proper PPE as directed, you are not exposed and it is safe for you to go home to your family and interact with your coworkers.
- If you were wearing all the proper PPE, but develop cold and flu symptoms, you may have been exposed to infectious coworkers or infectious persons in the community. If you become sick, call Occupational Health and inform your supervisor (see Question 8).
- Even if you are exposed because of not wearing some or all of the recommended PPE when caring for a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patient, contact with an infected person alone **does NOT mean you are infected with the virus.**
- Becoming infected is signaled when you develop symptoms. On average, it takes about 5 days to become sick with the virus, but it can occur as early as 2 days after exposure and as late as 14 days after exposure.

10. I was exposed to a COVID-19 patient – how can I protect my family and others?

Remember, contact with an infected person alone does NOT definitely mean you will become infected with the virus. You will only know if symptoms develop sometime during the 14 day incubation period after exposure. Practice the following strict hygiene and social distancing measures to protect yourself and others.

- If you were exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 case, see the *"UCI Health Staff Self-Monitoring While Working"* instructions on the COVID-19 SharePoint for specific instructions on how to avoid spreading illness to household members.
- You are allowed to work while you are asymptomatic. While asymptomatic at home, wash your hands or use alcohol hand rub often, including before and after touching your face or objects others touch frequently (e.g. door handle, refrigerator).
- Use disinfectant wipes to clean your environment frequently.
- Do not share household items (e.g., utensils, drinking glasses) and wash linens regularly with soap/detergent.
- If you become sick, review *"UCI Health Staff Self-Monitoring While Working"*:
  - Keep a 6-foot distance from others as much as possible.
  - Wear a regular mask as much as possible.
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol hand rub, and disinfect all objects that you touch that others may touch.
  - Cover your cough and sneeze with a tissue or your sleeve.
  - Do not share food or household items.

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11. My household member was just diagnosed with COVID-19. Can I still come to work?

- Call Occupational health as they will make the final determination. Currently, public health guidance recommends that all household contacts of persons with COVID-19 should remain home until the 14 day incubation period has passed.
- Use strict hygiene and social distancing measure to avoid getting sick from your family member (see Question 10).
- Check yourself for fever twice daily and monitor for any other symptoms (see Question 8). If you become ill, contact Occupational Health for testing. If you are tested through your primary care provider, remember that any COVID-19 positive test performed external to UCI must be reported to UCI Occupational Health.

12. What is known about COVID-19 and pregnancy?

- According to CDC, current epidemiology suggests that pregnant women are not more likely to develop severe disease due to COVID-19.
- However, we recommend pregnant faculty, staff, and trainees limit care of patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, especially during higher risk procedures (e.g., aerosol generating procedures), if feasible based on staffing availability. They should avoid in-person patient care and patient contact after the 37th week of gestation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will minimize maternal infection risk, thus minimizing risk of mother/infant separation after birth if a mother is COVID-19 positive. Staff members with questions should speak with their director.
- The available data does not support removing pregnant providers from work at this time. However, information about this disease is constantly changing, so we will continue to re-assess as additional findings become available.
- Contact your Human Resources Representative if special accommodations are necessary.
- See CDC guidance for COVID-19 and pregnancy for answers to questions about transmission during delivery and breastfeeding.

13. Where can I go to learn more?

- The situation is evolving rapidly and UCIMC is following national guidance as it emerges. Up to date information can be found at:
- UCI's COVID Share Point
- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) (www.cdc.gov)
- California Department of Public Health (CDPH) (www.cdph.ca.gov)
- Orange County Health Care Agency: (www.ochealthinfo.com)