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CDC Issues New Guidance: Options to Shorten COVID-19 Quarantine Period

While continuing to champion a 14-day quarantine to more completely reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) has offered two shorter quarantine options for non-positive cases (i.e. for those exposed to a positive case).

After Day 10

Quarantine can end after day 10 without testing if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring. Under this approach, the CDC estimates the residual post-quarantine transmission risk is between approximately 1% and 10%.

After Day 7

When diagnostic testing resources are sufficient and available, quarantine can end after day 7 if a diagnostic specimen test is negative and no symptoms were reported during daily monitoring. While the specimen may be collected and tested within 48 hours before the planned quarantine discontinuation, the quarantine cannot be discontinued earlier than day 7.

Under this approach, the CDC estimates the residual post-quarantine transmission risk is between approximately 5% and 12%.

Additional Conditions for the Reduced Quarantine Periods

Quarantine under these reduced time periods can be discontinued only if the following criteria are met:

- No clinical evidence of COVID-19 has been detected by daily symptom monitoring during the quarantine period up to the time the quarantine is discontinued;
- Daily symptom monitoring continues through day 14; and

- People are counseled to strictly adhere to all recommended non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., mitigation strategies). If any symptoms develop, they should immediately self-isolate and contact the local public health authority or their healthcare provider to report their clinical status change.

CDC's Rationale

The CDC cautioned that testing to trigger earlier discontinuation of quarantine should be considered only if it will have no impact on community diagnostic testing. It also stressed that people can continue to quarantine for 14 days.

Distilled to its essence, the CDC continues to recommend a 14-day quarantine to more completely reduce the spread of COVID-19. The shorter quarantine options are intended to balance reducing the personal burdens of quarantining (physical, mental, economic) against a small increase to the possibility of spread versus a 14-day quarantine.

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