



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES  
*Aging and Long-Term Support Administration*  
*PO Box 45600, Olympia, Washington 98504-5600*

January 10, 2022

AL TSA: AFH #2022-002  
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AL TSA: NH #2022-007

**UPDATES FROM CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION AND  
WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

Dear Administrator/Provider/Superintendent:

This letter is to notify you of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Washington State Department of Health (DOH) guidance updated due to concerns about increased transmissibility of the SARS-CoV-2 [Omicron variant](#).

**CDC Update Summary:**

1. Ensure that SARS-CoV-2 testing is performed with a test that can detect SARS-CoV-2 variants currently circulating in the United States.
2. Updated definition of higher-risk exposure to include when a healthcare worker wears a facemask (instead of a respirator) when caring for an infected person who is not wearing a facemask or cloth mask.
3. Updated return to work recommendations for healthcare personnel (HCP) infected or exposed to SARS-CoV-2. Added options include:
  - a. Allowing asymptomatic HCP diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2 to return to work in 10 days, or in 7 days with a negative COVID-19 test IF:
    - i. The negative test was done 48 hours before returning to work; AND
    - ii. The HCP is asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic with improving symptoms.
  - b. Allowing asymptomatic HCP exposed to SARS-CoV-2 to:
    - i. If boosted - Have no work restrictions and negative test at 2 and 5-7 days.
    - ii. If vaccinated or unvaccinated - Return to work in 10 days or 7 days with a negative COVID-19 test 48 hours before return.

**DOH Update Summary:**

1. Maintaining appropriate staffing in health care facilities is essential to providing a safe work environment for HCP and safe patient care. Health care facilities may choose to implement contingency capacity staffing and crisis capacity staffing. CDC's [Strategies to Mitigate Healthcare Personnel Staffing Shortages](#) offer a continuum of options for addressing staffing shortages.
2. During HCP staffing shortages facilities, should follow guidance from CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>
3. Preventing illness among HCP is a key component of mitigating staffing shortages. DOH strongly encourages all HCP to get a booster dose of vaccine and for health care employers to make access to booster doses of vaccine available onsite for their employees. HCP should also get a yearly influenza vaccination.

**What this means to you, effective immediately:**

- Check the Federal Food and Drug Administration site [SARS-CoV-2 Viral Mutations: Impact on COVID-19 Tests](#) to see if test materials in use by your Long-Term Care (LTC) setting can detect the Omicron variant.
- Follow CDC Interim Guidance for Managing Healthcare Personnel with SARS-CoV-2 Infection or Exposure to SARS-CoV-2 <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html> related to:
  - High risk exposure for HCP who was wearing a face mask in the presence of an infected person who was not wearing a mask; and
  - HCP Return-to-Work guidance for COVID-19 infection and exposure.
- LTC settings will need to determine which work restriction mitigation strategy to implement based on their staffing shortage.
  - A facility may be in conventional staffing levels for environmental services, but contingency staffing for nursing.
  - Facilities should return to conventional staffing as soon as resources allow.
  - Any LTC setting at crisis staffing levels should follow the Critical Staffing Management in Long-Term Care Procedures outlined in the October 19, 2021 [Provider Letters](#) for each setting.
- Consult DOH Interim Recommendations to Mitigate Health Care Worker Staffing Shortage During the COVID-19 Pandemic for further information.  
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/820-217-InterimHCStaffShortage.pdf>

Thank you for your continued commitment to resident health and safety. If you have any questions, please contact [Katherine.Ander@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:Katherine.Ander@dshs.wa.gov)

Sincerely,



For Mike Anbesse, Director  
Residential Care Services

DSHS: "Transforming Lives"