

ASHLAND COVID FAQs October 20th, 2020

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID?

The Ashland Covid Team has seen VERY few cases with cough, shortness of breath and fever like we did in the spring. That may change in the months to come, but for right now we hear a lot of headache, fatigue, body aches and/or sore throat. Loss of taste/smell is very common too. Symptoms are SO variable, even within the same household. We've seen homes where all individuals are positive and each with a different presentation: one person was hospitalized with shortness of breath, cough and fever, one person had diarrhea, one person had headache/sore throat/body aches, one had loss of smell and one had no symptoms despite a positive result. Sometimes you just don't know that you have it. Individuals are contagious 48 hours prior to symptoms starting. It spreads before the person knows they even have it. "We're SO safe! We only see healthy people!" is not applicable here.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF TESTS?

PCR testing is the most sensitive and specific form of testing available (read: accurate), and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health qualifies PCR testing as the ONLY way to confirm a Covid diagnosis. Yes, PCR testing is the test that "tickles your brain", but it is also available in easy nose swabs and in some (few) locations as a saliva test. This is the preferred form of testing for the most accurate results.

Antigen testing is much less accurate and has been notorious for many false negatives and some false positives. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health qualifies a positive antigen result as "probable", and we encourage you to avoid this form of testing.

WHERE SHOULD I GET TESTED?

There's so many options! Local urgent cares and some primary care office testing sites are now widely available. Some locations will require you to have symptoms and/or a known close contact. Call ahead to see what tests they perform, and remember you want a PCR test, NOT and antigen test.

The most efficient and FREE option is the "Stop the Spread" sites located all over the state. These sites do not require you to have close contact or symptoms, and they perform PCR testing. Results are available within 72 hours, though as of now (10/20/20), results have been available much faster.

Listed below are the Stop the Spread testing sites located in Framingham:

<https://www.framinghamma.gov/2952/COVID-19-Testing-Information> (English)

<https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/39380/PORT-COVID-TESTING-IN-FRAMINGHAM> (Portuguese)

<https://www.framinghamma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/39381/Spanish-COVID-TESTING-IN-FRAMINGHAM> (Spanish)

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT AFTER I TEST?

The swab is sent to a lab where results are determined. Results are then sent both to the place where the test was performed AND to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. The Mass DPH then inputs the information into their central system called MAVEN. No need for alarm! MAVEN is a database where all public health labs results are tracked. This reporting system is not Covid specific; if you have ever had a lab-confirmed infectious disease (Lyme, flu, norovirus, etc) you're in there already.

-If you are **negative** and were **NOT a close contact** of someone with Covid, that's it! There's no need for any follow up - but please continue wearing a mask, distancing from others outside of your family and avoiding indoor gatherings.

-If you are **negative** and you **WERE a close contact** of someone with Covid, **you must complete your 14-day quarantine.**

-If you are **positive**, that record is sent to the public health team in the individual town where you live and a delightful person will call you to follow up. The BOH team generally receives results 24 hours after you do, so please **begin isolating immediately** and let your contacts know they should quarantine and wait 5-7 days after their last contact with you to test.

WHAT WILL THE CONTACT TRACERS SAY?

The purpose of contact tracing is to educate positive cases and their contacts as soon as possible about the need to isolate (positive cases) or quarantine (close contacts). The contact tracers will tell your contacts when the best and most accurate time to test is, and where the best testing sites are located.

The Ashland Covid Team is a delightful group of public health professionals who are here to help you and the community stay safe and healthy.

They will ask how you are, what your symptoms are and when they began. They will ask about questions you may have or what resources you may need that we can help provide. They will ask where you work to assess risk to your coworkers/clients. It's very important to know if you work in healthcare, education or food services where you have likely been in contact with many people. Many of the nursing home cases in the spring were related to employees with multiple jobs who unknowingly carried the virus from one facility to another. They will ask for the contact information of the people you were with from 48 hours prior to the beginning of your symptoms up until you went into isolation. Covid is contagious two days before you start showing symptoms, which is why we go back 48 hours before symptoms began. They will ask for the first and last name of the individuals and their phone number.

When the contact tracers call your contacts, they will educate them on where to test (Stop the Spread sites) and when (5-7 days after exposure). They will ask for their name, birthday and address. YES! That seems very uncomfortable to answer when a stranger is cold calling you, but the intention is to create a file within the database so that when the individual is tested and their results go through the DPH, their results will be linked to a known close contact instead of appearing as a new exposure. There is a method to our madness.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A "CLOSE CONTACT"?

A "close contact" is a person who has been in direct contact with a Covid-positive individual within 6 feet for 15 minutes or longer from 48 hours prior to symptom onset to the time the positive individual goes into isolation.

As soon as an individual is notified that they are a close contact, they should immediately begin a 14-day quarantine and plan to have a PCR test performed 5-7 days after their last

exposure to the positive individual. Incubation time of Covid is variable, from 2-14 days, with an average onset of symptoms/positive results at 5-7 days. A negative test on one day, does not mean you will remain negative throughout the 14 days. A negative test result will NOT excuse a close contact from quarantine.

ISOLATION VERSUS QUARANTINE

Isolation for 10 days is for **positive individuals**: you are expected to stay in a separate space with a separate bathroom for 10 days from the onset of symptoms or, if you were asymptomatic, from the day that you took your test which came back positive. Evidence has shown viral load diminishes by day 9 to a point where you are no longer contagious. We call you on day 10 to make sure you've been free of fever without tylenol/motrin in the 24 hours before and that your other symptoms are improving, then we say you're clear (but please wear a mask when you go out.)

Quarantine for 14 days is for **close contacts**: Quarantine begins at the day of your last exposure to the positive individual. If you have a positive person in your home who can't isolate (kids, adult dependents), your quarantine will be longer - from the day their isolation starts extending 14 days from when they clear. You can mingle in your home, but no one comes inside and you shouldn't be going into anyone else's home. Avoid grandparents or anyone who may be at-risk.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CONTACT TRACING:

"I'm going to be fined!" : False.

"I'm going to be in trouble!" : Also not true

The goal of ALL of this is to mitigate risk where we can so that we can continue to have nice things (ie: school)

MY KID WAS A CLOSE CONTACT, DOES MY WHOLE FAMILY NEED TO QUARANTINE?

Technically, no. Not unless your kid (the close contact) ends up coming back positive after they're tested.

I WAS WEARING A MASK, WHY AM I A CLOSE CONTACT?!

Use of masks does not negate your qualification as a "close contact" given the variability of mask construction and the way people wear them (that's you, under-the-nose wearers.)

IF WEARING A MASK DOESN'T GET ME OUT OF HAVING TO QUARANTINE, WHY WEAR ONE?

Because use of masks significantly reduces your exposure to viral load! Severity of illness is correlated to the amount of virus you're exposed to. Wearing a mask cuts down on the viral particles you emit, and it also reduces the volume of viral particles you breathe in!

WHERE ARE PEOPLE GETTING INFECTED and WHY?!

Indoor, unmasked gatherings with family. Indoor, unmasked gatherings with friends. Riding unmasked in the same car together. Staying in a hotel/Airbnb together. Sitting together in a restaurant. The common thread here is poorly ventilated indoor spaces!

Covid is transmitted through droplets (large particles emitted from coughs/sneezes) and aerosols (emitted from talking, laughing, singing, yelling). Six feet is not a hard and fast barrier for aerosol transmission as the particles are able to travel further. Picture being in a

room with cigarette smoke. Obviously you'll inhale more second-hand smoke in a space within 6 feet, but think of the thin trails of smoke that travel a further distance. If an infected person has a high viral load, their infectious airborne particles can potentially infect others from a further distance. This is why masks, especially indoors, are necessary.

SHOULD I WEAR GLOVES?

Probably not. There is very little evidence that the virus lasts long enough on surfaces in an amount needed to infect you. An infected person would need to cough/sneeze on a surface close to the time you touch it, and then you would need to touch your eyes/nose/mouth with the same hand. Good handwashing should suffice!