

**Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH)
Alabama Emergency Response Technology (ALERT)
Health Alert Network (HAN)
December 28, 2021**

COVID-19 Update for Hospitals and Healthcare Personnel

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) follows the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding the response to the COVID 19 pandemic. Due to the growing number of COVID-19 cases from the Omicron variant, CDC is currently in the process of reviewing and modifying quarantine and isolation recommendations after infection or exposure to COVID-19. On December 23, 2021, after a careful review of the current understanding of disease trajectory¹, the CDC changed several of its specific recommendations for healthcare workers². The goal for these recommendations is to maintain appropriate staffing in healthcare facilities, as this is essential in providing a safe work environment for healthcare personnel and safe patient care.

In the setting of rising COVID-19 cases, facilities are best positioned to evaluate their own needs as to whether conventional, contingency, or crisis strategies are most appropriate at a given time. Therefore, the guidance for contingency and crisis management in the setting of significant healthcare worker shortages was also updated³. These strategies are meant to be implemented sequentially to address healthcare staffing shortages. If conventional strategies cannot be sustained during a surge in cases, facilities may consider implementing contingency strategies, then crisis strategies, in an incremental manner.

Healthcare personnel with higher-risk exposure under conventional conditions

If personnel have received all COVID-19 vaccine and booster doses as recommended by CDC, they do not need to be restricted from work if they have had a higher-risk exposure but do not have symptoms. However, they should isolate immediately if they develop symptoms. Asymptomatic healthcare personnel who have not received all COVID-19 vaccine and booster doses as recommended by CDC, and who have had a higher-risk exposure to SARS-CoV-2, can return to the workplace after day ten without testing. Additional recommendations for contingency and crisis strategies are outlined further in the complete guidance (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/mitigating-staff-shortages.html>).

Healthcare personnel who are exposed should use well-fitting respiratory source control all times while in the facility and follow all conventional, contingency, and crisis strategies and follow all recommended infection prevention and control practices.

Healthcare personnel with SARS-CoV-2 infection under conventional conditions

Healthcare facilities can allow asymptomatic healthcare personnel with SARS-CoV-2 infection, regardless of vaccination status, to return to work after seven days and a negative test in accordance with CDC guidance. For healthcare personnel who were symptomatic, fever should have resolved without medications, as detailed in Return to Work Criteria. Under contingency or crisis conditions

(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/mitigating-staff-shortages.html>), facilities may elect to shorten this seven-day isolation period with or without testing depending on the circumstances.

If allowed to return to work before the seven-day period, these healthcare personnel should wear a respirator or well-fitting facemask even when they are in non-patient care areas. Facilities should consider assigning these healthcare personnel to duties that do not include care of immunocompromised patients.

Importunately, conventional work restrictions for healthcare personnel should not be shortened under certain circumstances. This includes healthcare personnel who are moderately to severely immunocompromised. Also, in the event of ongoing transmission within a facility that is not controlled with initial interventions, strong consideration should be given to using more stringent work restriction for healthcare personnel with higher-risk exposures.

Recommendations for all Healthcare Personnel

Consistent with previous guidelines, the Alabama Department of Public Health and the CDC recommended that all personnel get all doses of COVID-19 vaccines, including additional and booster doses as recommended by CDC as well as influenza vaccine to protect yourself, your family, and your patients⁴.

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/omicron-variant.html>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/mitigating-staff-shortages.html>
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/covid-19-vaccines-us.html>