COLUMBUS
COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

News Release
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Columbus medical professionals offer advice on when to get tested for COVID-19

For Immediate Release

(COLUMBUS, Neb.) – The coronavirus pandemic is an ever-changing global situation. New information is released daily, and misinformation can cause confusion. With a recent uptick in local cases, Columbus medical professionals would like to offer advice on when people should get tested for COVID-19.

"We are seeing cases every day," said Dr. Daniel Rosenquist, physician at Columbus Family Practice. "We're probably seeing an average of 3-5 positive tests a day, with another 10-15 people who have been potentially exposed and are showing symtoms consistent with COVID-19."

The situation is similar at Columbus Medical Center. Dr. Luke Lemke, physician at Columbus Medical Center, said the clinic is seeing an average of 50-70 people a day who are displaying COVID-19 symptoms, and from that, about a 20%-25% positive rate for the virus.

"COVID-19 is as bad now as we've seen it as far as number of people who have symptoms," Lemke said. "While it is important for people to get tested if they have been exposed, it may take two or three days for them to show a COVID-19 positive test."

People who have had close contact with someone who is actively infected with COVID-19 should consider getting tested five days after exposure. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines "close contact" as being within six feet for a total of 15 minutes or more during a 24-hour period, within two days prior to illness onset. This is regardless of whether the contact was wearing a mask or if they were vaccinated.

The CDC recommends anyone with any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 get tested, regardless of vaccination status or prior infection.

"We are testing these people to confirm to them that they need to physically distance themselves from others," said Rosenquist. "Vaccinated individuals can test positive and spread the virus to unvaccinated people, who we are worried about the most because they have been requiring more significant intervention and therapies."

"If a person tests positive for COVID-19, they still need to isolate, even if they have been vaccinated," Lemke said. "If they are unvaccinated and test positive, they need to contact their physician for further instructions or treatment."

If someone is not sure whether they have been exposed, but is showing signs of COVID-19, they should be tested. Symptoms of COVID-19 vary and could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Fever or chills.
- Cough.
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing.
- Fatigue.
- Muscle or body aches.
- Headache.
- New loss of taste or smell.
- Sore throat.
- Congestion or runny nose.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Diarrhea.

Rosenquist stresses the importance of COVID-19 testing for the overall health of our community, but also for the mental wellness of our health care workers.

"I'm really concerned about the overall mental health of the health care industry," he said. "Physicians, advanced care providers, nurses and other staff get attached to their patients, and it falls on them to watch people suffer and know they didn't have to."

As a general rule of thumb, Columbus medical professionals recommend the below guidelines on when to get tested for COVID-19.

Guidelines for COVID-19 testing

- Anyone with any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 should get tested, regardless of vaccination status or prior infection.
- For people with symptoms, vaccinated or not, a negative rapid COVID-19 test doesn't completely rule out the illness. It may still be recommended to complete a send-out test and continue quarantine until it is appropriate to return to work or school.

After a known exposure to COVID-19

- A vaccinated person who is not showing symptoms may continue to go to work or school, while wearing a mask and closely monitoring for symptoms for 14 days.
  - At least three days after the last exposure, the person in question should consider having a COVID-19 PCR test to make sure they are not an asymptomatic carrier.
    - It is not recommended to test earlier than three days after the exposure if a person is not experiencing symptoms.
  - The best test for a post-exposure asymptomatic person is the send-out COVID-19 PCR test. It is the most accurate, and is recommended in this situation to have the best chance at identifying an asymptomatic carrier.
    - The send-out test will not affect a person's status while theywait for the results. That person may continue to go to work and school, as long as they wear a mask and have no symptoms.
    - The testing method is up to each person's medical provider.
      If the unvaccinated, asymptomatic person develops any symptoms, that person should self-quarantine and seek testing.
- An unvaccinated person who is not showing symptoms will need to quarantine and may get a COVID-19 PCR test at a minimum of five days or longer after exposure. This will likely be a send-out COVID-19 test because of the accuracy of this test in this situation.
  - This person should quarantine until their test results are reported.
    - If the test is negative and this person remains asymptomatic, they may return to work or school on the eighth day after exposure, and as long as they continue to wear a mask and remain symptom-free for 14 days.
    - Theymust wait until the test results are returned and reported as negative. This may be longer than they expect, but it is the best and most accurate way to return to activity safely.
    - If the unvaccinated person develops symptoms after a negative result is reported, they should seek retesting at that time and restart quarantine. It is not recommended to perform a rapid COVID-19 test in the cases of unvaccinated individuals who have exposure to individuals with active COVID-19 illness, but ultimately, it is up to each person's medical provider.

- If an unvaccinated individual is in close contact with someone with active COVID-19 illness and chooses not to get tested, the current recommendations are to:

- o Quarantine for 10 days after the exposure, then return to school or work on the 11th day after the exposure. This person should continue to wear a mask and monitor for any symptoms until 14 days after the original exposure.
- a. After the 14th day, this person may return to normal activity as long as they are symptom-free.

For more information on these guidelines or the current situation with COVID-19 in Columbus, please contact your medical provider.

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