Client Alert: CDC Relaxes COVID-19 Safety Recommendations in Updated Guidance

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Last week, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued updated COVID-19 guidance. This update loosens prior guidelines regarding social distancing, testing, and isolation, with the agency noting that "[h]igh levels of immunity and availability of effective COVID-19 prevention and management tools have reduced the risk for medically significant illness and death."

The CDC continues to promote the importance of being up to date with vaccination to protect against serious illness. However, the CDC dropped its recommendation that individuals who are not up to date on vaccination "stay at least six feet away from other people" in indoor public spaces. Instead, the CDC notes that it is important to consider the risk in a particular setting, including local COVID-19 Community Levels and the important role of ventilation, when assessing the need to maintain physical distance. The CDC also instructs that testing of asymptomatic people is no longer recommended in most community settings.

Further, the CDC recommends that instead of quarantining after exposure to COVID-19, individuals should wear a high-quality mask for ten days and get tested at least five full days after the exposure. This recommendation now applies regardless of an individual's vaccination status.

Still, people who develop symptoms should isolate and test for COVID-19. If the test result is negative, isolation can be ended. Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 should follow the CDC's full isolation recommendations, including staying home for at least five days. If after five days symptoms improve and fever subsides for 24 hours without use of medication, the isolation can be ended. The CDC notes an exception for individuals with moderate illness, including shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, and those with weakened immune systems, recommending that such individuals quarantine for at least ten days. Further, those who develop severe illness should consult with a healthcare provider before ending their isolation. If COVID-19 symptoms worsen after ending isolation, the CDC says to restart isolation at day zero.

For all people testing positive for COVID-19, the CDC recommends wearing a mask for at least ten days and avoiding contact with people likely to get very sick from the virus for at least 11 days.

EMPLOYER TIP

Following this updated guidance, employers may wish to modify policies and practices that currently track older CDC guidance regarding COVID-19 safety. However, in doing so, employers should be cognizant of any relevant local and/or state level guidance or requirements.

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