

CDC Reduces Quarantine Periods for Close Contacts to Reflect Economic Realities and Alleviate Burden on Public Health System

Dec 04 2020

Posted By: Craig T. Papka & Robert J. Simandl

Practice Area: Labor and Employment

On December 2, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published updated guidance that relaxes its requirements for quarantine periods for people exposed to COVID-19 through “close contacts.” Previously, people with close contacts—generally defined as having been within 6 feet of someone who has COVID-19 for a total of 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period—were required to quarantine for 14 days after the last date of contact. The new guidelines offer options to reduce the recommended quarantine period.

While the CDC continues to recommend that individuals with “close contact” with someone who is COVID-19 positive quarantine for 14 days after the period of last exposure, the CDC acknowledges the need to reduce the economic burden associated with lengthy quarantines, which often result in unnecessary lost work time and otherwise unnecessarily burden the public health system. Per the CDC, the new quarantine options will reduce the burden on health care workers and increase community compliance. In light of these concerns, the CDC has revised its guidance on quarantine responsibilities by reducing the quarantine period. The CDC guidance now indicates individuals who have been in close-contact scenarios, and who are without symptoms, may end their quarantine after 10 days from last contact. This quarantine period can be reduced to 7 days if the individual obtains a negative COVID-19 test result. The CDC cautions that individuals should still practice good hygiene and social distancing upon ending quarantine, and to continue to watch for symptoms until 14 days after exposure. If symptoms develop, individuals must immediately self-isolate and contact their local public health authority.

CDC guidance is an ever-changing landscape. Employers are advised to continue monitoring the latest health and safety information on both the local and national level. In light of the CDC’s acknowledgement of economic hardship on businesses brought on by quarantine situations, employers are advised to:

- Review their COVID-19 policies and update to reflect the revised close contact guidance;
- Update operating procedures and educate employees and supervisors on the revised rules;
- Evaluate the economic and business impact of the changes versus the additional safety precautions afforded with the extended quarantine period; and
- Consider the state and federal labor and employment law compliance obligations and the liability associated with a failure in compliance.

Employers wishing to update their COVID-19 policies are advised to consult with experienced labor and employment counsel to ensure the maximization of legal compliance and minimization of risk.

von Briesen & Roper Legal Update is a periodic publication of von Briesen & Roper, s.c. It is intended for general information purposes for the community and highlights recent changes and developments in the legal area. This publication does not constitute legal advice, and the reader should consult legal counsel to determine how this information applies to any specific situation.