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COVID-19 von Briesen Task Force Resource: CDC Revises COVID-19 Isolation and Quarantine Guidelines

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Practice Area: Labor and Employment

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") on Monday, December 27, 2021, updated its guidance on COVID-19 safety protocols for vaccinated, unvaccinated, exposed and positive tested persons. The updates are effective immediately and may help employers address the coordination of staffing and return to work obligations. While vaccination and booster status remains central to employee opportunities for return to work, there is a symmetry occurring that helps to manage the health risk with new data on COVID-19.

The effect of the new guidelines can be summarized as follows:

1. **Vaccinated and unvaccinated persons – tested positive for COVID-19** – 5-day isolation requirement and if symptom free at the end of the 5 days, end of isolation (can return to work) but need to wear mask for 5 days.
2. **Unvaccinated persons or if Pfizer or Moderna vaccination is more than 6 months old (2 months for Johnson & Johnson) and not yet boosted – Exposure to COVID-19 positive person** – 5-day quarantine recommendation and if symptom free at the end of the 5 days, end of quarantine (can return to work) but need to wear mask for 5 days. **NOTE:** If the 5-day quarantine is not feasible, the person may leave home but a "well-fitting mask" must be worn at all times for 10 days after the exposure.
3. **Vaccinated persons (with either Pfizer or Moderna vaccine in last 6 months or Johnson & Johnson in last 2 months but no Booster) – Exposure to COVID-19 positive person** – if no symptoms, no quarantine period required but masking for 10 days is required.
4. **Vaccinated and booster received – Exposure to COVID-19 positive person** – no quarantine is required after an exposure but should be masked for 10 days following the exposure.

The guidance makes clear that if COVID-19 symptoms do arise at any time – during isolation, during quarantine or after any such period – the person is to immediately isolate/quarantine. If the symptoms resolve after the 5-day isolation/quarantine period, the person is able to return to work if symptom free and without fever for 24 hours. Also, the CDC suggests that all persons who have been exposed to COVID-19 should get a test around 5 days after exposure.

It is important to remember the CDC guidance is just that – guidance. Employers will need to continue to monitor regulations imposed by state and local health authorities and follow those requirements to the extent they differ from the CDC guidance. Moreover, the regulations and requirements under those regulations may differ for public and private sector employers. As well, the regulations differ depending upon the type of facility where an individual is employed such as a healthcare facility.

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