

# CDC Chastised Over Decision to Shorten COVID Isolation Period, Motivated by Business Not Science



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shortened its [recommended isolation period](#) for people with COVID from 10 to five days, if asymptomatic, followed by five days of wearing a mask when around others – despite the fact that [masks are ineffective](#) and people with asymptomatic COVID [can still transmit the virus](#) and infect others.

Individuals who have received a booster are off the hook for quarantine following exposure, but are encouraged to wear a mask for 10 days after being exposed, the guidance said.

The new recommendation came less than a week after the agency changed its guidance to [7 days for health care workers](#) and after Delta Airlines asked the CDC to shorten the window to five days for fully vaccinated individuals who experience breakthrough COVID infections, citing the impact on the

carrier's workforce.

Previously, people who were exposed to COVID but had not tested positive were advised to quarantine for 14 days, and people who tested positive for COVID were advised to isolate for 10 days.

The CDC said the [change was motivated](#) by science showing the majority of viral transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in the first two days prior to onset of symptoms and the two to three days after.

"CDC's updated recommendations for isolation and quarantine balance what we know about the spread of the virus and the protection provided by vaccination and booster doses. These updates ensure people can safely continue their daily lives," CDC Director [Rochelle Walensky](#) said in a statement.

Experts were quick to question the agency given there is little data on the Omicron variant and no science supporting a five-day isolation period. Others said the CDC's decision was motivated by business and not by science.

*New CDC isolation guidance seems to be a top down, corporate-driven, poorly coordinated decision.*

*1) Delta Airlines asked for this.*

*2) CDC staff I spoke with wasn't aware of this guidance change until it dropped, says staff is now being asked to write scientific justification.*

*– Andrew Goldstein #EndVaccineApartheid (@AndrewMakeTweet)  
[December 28, 2021](#)*

*In case this wasn't obvious to you all, the CDC's new recommendation to shorten the quarantine period from 10 to 5 days is a business decision, not a public health decision.*

– Brian MD (@bone00afide) [December 27, 2021](#)

*Now the CDC says you don't have to quarantine at all if you sage your entire house and then put some anointing oil on your mask.*

– Michael Harriot (@michaelharriot) [December 29, 2021](#)

There are serious issues with the CDC's new recommendation and the way they went about it. [Dr. Eric Topol](#), physician-scientist and author, said there is no data or evidence to back up a 5-day isolation period.

“There was no mention of using a test, to confirm that the isolated individual is now OK to circulate, that there is no indication of infectiousness,” Topol said. And “there are no data for Omicron's clearance time. We know the characteristics of shedding and average time it takes for clearance of the virus for Delta and preceding variants, but to date we have not seen any such data for Omicron kinetics.”

Topol said the [CDC's guidance](#) assumes all people handle the virus similarly when, in fact, there is considerable variability.

### **Delta lobbies CDC to reduce isolation period over potential workforce shortages**

Delta CEO Ed Bastian, CH0 Henry Ting and medical advisor Carlos del Rio on Dec. 21, [sent a letter](#) to Walensky requesting the agency shorten its recommended 10-day COVID-positive isolation period to five days – as a 10-day policy “may significantly impact our workforce and operations.”

“To address the potential impact of the current isolation policy safely, we propose a 5-day isolation from symptom onset for those who experience a breakthrough infection,” the letter

stated. "Individuals would be able to end isolation with an appropriate testing protocol."

In return, Delta offered to provide empirical data to the CDC.

A day later, JetBlue sent the CDC a [similar request](#). "Healthcare workers, first responders, airline professionals and many other essential employees across the economy who are fully vaccinated may no longer need a full 10-day isolation," CEO Robin Hayes said, describing the earlier guidance as "extremely disruptive."

The CDC did not [respond to a request](#) for comment on whether Delta's letter influenced its decision, but said the change is "motivated by science demonstrating that the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [told CNN Monday](#) the new guidance was based on the prevalence of the omicron variant.

"With the sheer volume of new cases that we are having and that we expect to continue with omicron, one of the things we want to be careful of is that we don't have so many people out," Fauci said.

"@CDCgov is saying 'we need people back to work quicker even if they are still sick.' Is this based on public health and science? Or is this in response to corporations like Delta who asked for shorter times?" Rep. Rashida Tlaib, (D-MI) said in a [tweet](#). "I truly hope the CDC is making decisions that will keep us safe instead of protecting corporate bottom lines."

The [CDC's guidance](#) did not recommend people receive a negative test before returning to their places of employment, nor did it take into account the rising number of breakthrough COVID cases occurring in the fully vaccinated population.

## **CDC alters rules for healthcare workers who test positive for COVID**

The CDC on Dec. 23, [altered the rules](#) for when healthcare workers who tested positive for COVID could return to work, reducing the isolation period from 10 days to 7 – and the period could be shortened even further if there were staff shortages. The agency also changed its guidance for healthcare workers who had “a higher-risk exposure to SARS-CoV-2” so that they didn’t necessarily have to quarantine at all.

At the time, the rules did not apply to workers from any other profession, sparking backlash against the CDC, who said its motivation was to “prevent undue burden on our healthcare facilities,” after thousands were fired over the Biden Administration’s COVID vaccine mandate.