



Elkhart County Health Department

Across the country, COVID-19 cases are skyrocketing, fueled largely by the spread of the highly contagious omicron variant. This sudden increase in case rates has stressed our national supply of FDA approved COVID tests and Elkhart County is not immune to this nationwide shortage. On Tuesday, January 4, 2022, the State of Indiana informed us that our local free testing locations would immediately begin rationing rapid tests. Currently, only two groups of people qualify for rapid tests at these sites:

1. Anyone person age 18 or younger, regardless of their symptoms
2. Anyone with symptoms who is age 50 or older

Currently, these restrictions will only apply to rapid tests. PCR tests, which may take several days to process, will still be available to everyone.

We understand that many businesses rely on rapid tests from our free testing sites to clear their employees to return to work with a negative test result. After these changes, though, that method may lead to delayed returns for your employees. To help smooth any issues that limited rapid testing availability may cause, the Elkhart County Health Department suggests that you update your official isolation policy to reflect current CDC recommendations on isolation. The CDC suggests that anyone who develops symptomatic COVID 19 isolate for just 5-days from the onset of symptoms¹. If they have gone 24 hours without fever and have seen an improvement in other symptoms, that patient may end isolation. If someone tests positive for COVID but never develops symptoms, they too only need to isolate for 5-days¹. Once the 5-day isolation period is over, these patients may return to work but should remain masked for an additional 5-days¹.

Please consider implementing these new recommendations into your existing policies and procedures. Until this current wave is over, we also ask that area businesses work with us to avoid unnecessary waste of testing supplies by not sending employees to the state-funded free testing sites to be cleared to return to work.

If changes to your current policies are not appealing, we would also like to remind you that testing kits may be obtained on the open market, and would strongly encourage your organization to begin purchasing test-kits if your policies will continue to require negative test results for your employees.

The limitations of local free testing should be also be acknowledged as you consider how your company will comply with OSHA's COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing ETS. Strengthening your internal ability to test by purchasing test kits or contracting with private diagnostic companies will limit your organizations reliance on unpredictable federal logistics issues to stay in compliance.

Regards,

^[1] *Quarantine and Isolation*. (2022, January 4). Retrieved from CDC.gov: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/quarantine-isolation.html>

