

**New COVID Isolation and Quarantine Guidance for Schools**

On January 10, 2022, the New Jersey Department of Health (“DOH”) shortened the recommended length of isolation and/or quarantines for K-12 students and staff from ten (10) to five (5) days. Now, according to the updated recommendations, if any person, regardless of vaccination status, experiences symptoms of, or tests positive for, COVID, they should isolate for at least five (5) full days after the day of their first symptoms or positive test. As before, COVID-infected persons should remain isolated until after the five (5) day isolation period, or for at least twenty-four (24) hours after their last symptoms, whichever occurs later. Also, as before, fully vaccinated individuals are not required to quarantine after close contact with a COVID-infected person; however, individuals who are not fully vaccinated and exposed to a close contact need quarantine only for five (5) days if they remain symptom-free.

**“Close Contact” Redefined**

One impact of the newly shortened quarantine/isolation periods is the revised definition of a close contact. More specifically, while proximity to a COVID-positive individual within five (5) days of a positive test result still counts as a close contact for the purposes of triggering quarantine requirements, the same contact with that person between days six (6) and ten (10) no longer qualifies as a close contact and a quarantine is not necessary.

**Post-Quarantine Guidelines**

The new guidelines also require individuals who have completed a five-day isolation or quarantine period to continue to follow certain protocols for the next five (5) days, after their quarantine or isolation period has ended. These protocols include the continued use of close-fitting masks, avoidance of people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, as well as the avoidance of eating around others. These new guidelines may prove difficult to adhere to, in the context of student and employee assignments and accommodation issues.

**“Fully Vaccinated” Redefined for Staff**

Finally, pursuant to the revisions, only staff who have received their booster vaccine are considered to be fully vaccinated for purposes of quarantine requirements. Accordingly, staff who have not received a booster should quarantine after all close contacts with COVID-positive individuals. Of note, however, Governor Murphy’s Executive Order 253, which requires staff testing, defines “fully vaccinated” as having received the two initial injections (or one from Johnson & Johnson), as that Executive Order was implemented prior to the Food and Drug Administration’s clearance for the administration of a third (booster) injection.

The Busch Law Group will continue to provide legal updates on these and other issues related to COVID-19, as necessary. Should you have any questions or concerns, including how to best incorporate these new guidelines at your schools, our attorneys are always available to assist you.

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01.12.2022

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