

Guidelines

COVID-19: Communication of illness and handling close contacts – for ETH Staff

1. Situation

In the current phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, supervisors are facing the issue of how to respond and share information if one of their team members tests positive for the coronavirus. When responding, supervisors must ensure that appropriate measures are taken to protect the health of all team members, and that privacy rights and data protection are respected for the person in question. The following definition is used:

Close contact

Close contacts are defined as situations in which people have spent more than 15 minutes together with less than 1.5 metres of distance between them without protection (mask or physical barrier like Plexiglas pane). The time frame to be considered is maximally 5 days before symptoms arise or before a confirmed positive test. The close contacts in this time frame are relevant as well as the last possible contact.

COVID-19 symptoms

Employees with symptoms of illness are obliged to stay at home until they have been free of symptoms for 48 hours. Typical symptoms of COVID19 infections are described on the [BAG website](#); a test is recommended, if these symptoms occur. Contact your general practitioner or the Ärztefon Zurich (0800 33 66 55) to take a coronavirus test as soon as possible.

2. Communication of COVID-19 cases: employee–supervisor

Supervisors should communicate transparently and proactively within their teams regarding COVID-19 cases in order to create trust and remove uncertainty and fear as far as possible. All communication should be done according to the need-to-know principle: information should be shared as sparingly as possible in compliance with privacy obligations.

These cases have to be distinguished: person shows symptoms of illness (A), had close contact with a person infected with COVID-19 (B), or has tested positively for COVID-19 (C), and whether the person in question is still working or on sick leave. If the person is on sick leave, a deputy must be named and included in the person's out-of-office message.

Anyone with symptoms of illness must remain at home and inform their supervisor. Anyone tested positively for COVID-19 must inform their supervisor, the [Coronateam](#) / [Occupational Medicine](#), and – in the departments – their department coordinator.

Anyone who finds themselves in any of the situations below should inform their supervisor and observe the appropriate measures:

A) Person exhibits general symptoms of illness (no known close contacts).

In case of symptoms (see "COVID-19 symptoms" above), the person must stay at home until 48 hours after symptoms have ceased. If the individual is able to work, they should do so from home. In accordance with Federal Office of Public Health (BAG) recommendations, the individual should be tested for coronavirus, even if symptoms are mild. The Executive Board recommends that members of ETH be tested for coronavirus in this case. To do so, the individual can contact their general practitioner or the Ärztefon Zurich (0800 33 66 55).

B) Person known to have had close contact with someone infected with COVID-19 but has no symptoms.

The authorities no longer require quarantine. However, ETH still recommends that you work from home for 10 days after having had close contact if possible. Else, you should always wear a mask when working ETH, and generally avoid contacts.

C) Person with a confirmed COVID-19 infection.

In the event of confirmed COVID-19 illness, the cantonal doctor orders 5 days of isolation. But again: ETH still recommends that you work from home for 10 days if possible. Else, you should always wear a mask when working ETH, and generally avoid contacts. **Persons who tested positively inform their (potential) close contacts themselves.**

In case the person having been tested positively is a lecturer with an ongoing lecture or with imminent exams, they have to inform the Academic Services via infolehre@ethz.ch immediately.

Anyone who has symptoms should stay at home until they have been without symptoms for 48 hours.

A person with a confirmed Covid-19-infection can return to the workplace, as instructed by the contact tracers, after 5 days of isolation, at the earliest, and after having been symptom-free for 48 hours.

You can find all relevant information on testing on the corresponding BAG-[page](#).

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