COVID-19: CDC Guidance on Returning to Work

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The spread of COVID-19 is impacting employers across the country. For workforces not able to work remotely, employers are asking how they should address workers who exhibit symptoms or have a confirmed case of the disease.

What steps should you take if one of your workers has COVID-19, and when should they be allowed to return to work? The CDC offers guidance on prudent timelines for different scenarios.

For instance, according to the CDC, if an employee has a fever and a cough, but then gets better without COVID-19 testing or medical care, they would be allowed to return to work under the following conditions:

1. Three days have passed since their recovery, which means their fever is resolved without the use of fever-reducing medication and their respiratory symptoms have improved; and
2. At least seven days have passed since they first experienced symptoms.

Another case could be an employee who is medically confirmed to have COVID-19 and is showing symptoms. In this instance, the worker would be allowed to return to work if:

1. Their fever has been resolved without the use of fever-reducing medications;
2. Their respiratory symptoms have improved (for example, cough or shortness of breath); and
3. They have had two negative COVID-19 tests.

For employees who have a laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19, but are not showing any symptoms, CDC currently says they may return to work:

1. After at least seven days have passed since the date of their first positive COVID-19 test; and
2. They have had no subsequent illness.

CDC advises that local authorities may adapt this and other COVID-19 guidance as circumstances change. The agency also has specific return-to-work guidance for healthcare personnel with confirmed or suspected COVID-19.