MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY

presenting YANKEE since 1976

COVID-19 Holiday Travel Questions and Answers

Note: This Q & A is intended to provide general information about COVID-19 and holiday travel and is not a substitute for legal advice. The answers below were provided by Cindy Cushman, president of HR2fit, an MDS Member Savings Program partner, during the November 16, 2020, "Holiday Challenges During COVID-19" live webinar. Several of the answers below have been updated from what was presented during the webinar to reflect accurate information (indicated by *). We recommend that if you refer to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts travel order, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and American Dental Association (ADA) for the most up-to-date guidance on COVID-19 testing and safety requirements.

Can employees go on unemployment benefits while quarantined after a positive COVID-19 test result?

Employees would not go on unemployment benefits while quarantined. Instead, they would be covered by the Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) for their two-week quarantine, being covered at 100% pay.

If traveling, is there a requirement for the employee to test once back and is it one or two negative tests 48 hours apart?

If traveling, it is encouraged to have the employee test before returning to work unless coming from a low-risk state. The employee can return to work after one negative test as long as they are asymptomatic.

What is the best approach to require a test-based return-to-work strategy?

Employees who test negative can return to work with a doctor's note once they are no longer symptomatic. Employees who tested positive for COVID-19 should return to work only after 1) at least 10 days after symptoms first appeared **and** 2) at least 24 hours with no fever without any medicines, **and** 3) other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving.

Can a negative test returning from out-of-state travel be enough?

A negative result after returning to the state is enough to cover the employees returning to work if they are asymptomatic. Employees should be encouraged to have a doctor's note clearing them to return to work.

Are wages required for COVID-19 quarantine?

Wages are required under the FFCRA for anyone required to quarantine for COVID-19.

If employees have to quarantine because their children's daycares shut down due to COVID-19 cases, do we have to pay them?

Employees must be paid at two-thirds of the employee's rate for up to two weeks due to a quarantine because of a COVID outbreak at the childcare location.

My assistant is going to Mexico in February. She said she'll have a COVID-19 test when she arrives back in the United States. Is that okay?

Employees are encouraged to get tested within three days prior to arrival back in the United States. If they are not exhibiting any symptoms and have a negative test result, they should be clear to return to work.

If an employee has a family member that tests positive, how long must they quarantine before returning to work?

Employees with a positive family member should get tested immediately and quarantine until they receive the result. Depending on the result, they may have to follow positive quarantine guidelines. If negative, they can return when asymptomatic for 72 hours and with a doctor's note of clearance.

If my patient tests positive after he or she left my practice, what should we do as an employer?

As dental practices should be following the recommended CDC guidelines, any areas where the patient was during this or her visit should have been disinfected and staff should have been wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), which should drastically limit the risk of exposure. Any staff who were within close contact should be encouraged to get tested as a precaution.

I have a team member traveling to Colombia in December. What should she do in terms of testing and quarantine before returning to work?

Employees are encouraged to get tested within three days prior to arrival back in the United States. If they are not exhibiting any symptoms and have a negative test result, they should be clear to return to work.

If staff travels out of state (e.g., Florida), do they have to quarantine or is a negative test enough to return to work?

Employees are encouraged to get tested 72 hours prior to arrival back in the state. If they are exhibiting no symptoms and have a negative test result, they should be clear to return to work.

Do I have to pay employees for quarantine after they return from travel?

Yes, but the employees should have taken the steps to get tested within 72 hours prior to returning from their travel to help minimize the quarantine period. If they have no symptoms and receive a negative test result, they can return within 24 hours of having no signs of a fever.

Can a dentist prohibit staff from leaving the state for the holidays?

Staff may not be prohibited from leaving the state, but they can certainly be encouraged not to travel and not to attend large gatherings where social distancing is difficult.

Can a dentist require a staff member to test negative twice before allowing someone who has had COVID-19 return to work?

Yes, a practice can request testing negative twice, but that means they must pay for the time out until the employee meets the return-to-work criteria.

Does the size of the practice matter? Would having under 50 employees prove it would be a hardship exemption?

The size of the practice does determine a hardship in specific cases.

What counts as close contact?*

Per the CDC, being within six feet of a person who tests positive for COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period** starting from two days before illness onset (or for asymptomatic patients, two days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated is considered being within close contact.

** Includes individual exposures added together over a 24-hour period (e.g., three five-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes).

Do you need to contact patients who may have been exposed if a staff member tests positive for COVID-19?*

The ADA recommends that you contact all patients who may have had contact with the COVID-19 positive individual to determine whether they are symptomatic. It is recommended that the patients self-quarantine for 14 days and notify their physician if symptoms develop. More information can be found on the ADA's What to Do If Someone on Your Staff Tests Positive for COVID-19 resource.

Also, be sure to follow the recommendations of your local public health authority for additional steps. See the CDC's Criteria for Return to Work for Healthcare Personnel with SARS-CoV-2 Infection (Interim Guidance) for more information on infection control in the health care setting.

Can a visitor from out of state take a rapid test or does it have to be PCR test in order to satisfy the Massachusetts travel order?*

Only PCR-negative test results satisfy the waiving of quarantining according to the Massachusetts travel order, which states that regarding the PCR test: "Information about approved molecular tests can be found in the Department of Public Health Guidance. A negative result from an antigen test must be confirmed by a negative result from an FDA EUA-approved molecular (PCR) SARS-CoV2 test, on a sample obtained 72 hours or less prior to arrival in Massachusetts. Serology tests will not be accepted."