Public Health
Seattle & King County

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Re: Update of COVID Exposure Prevention and Action July 15, 2020

With increasing evidence of the benefit of masks to prevent infection transmission, the COVID Return to Work Algorithm has been updated to highlight a risk matrix and more liberal use of testing.

Matrix of Exposure Risk. The Centers for Disease Control has updated their definitions of exposure and strategies for management. The update has been adapted to a matrix that enables a quarantine decision based on the source person's use of a mask, the potential exposed person's use of PPE, and the need for treatment that could aerosolize the coronavirus. Although the updated matrix is generally consistent with the approach used by public safety in Seattle and King County, we are taking the opportunity to feature the matrix and update the downstream approach to quarantine and testing.

	Person with COVID-19		
	No mask	Cloth covering or facemask	AGP
Provider with no mask			
Provider + facemask			
Provider + facemask + eye protection			
Provider + full MEGG			N95 equivalent

Nasal Swab Testing. *The other important change by the CDC and Public Health is the recommendation that all persons with a definite exposure (one that requires quarantine) should be tested with a nasal swab regardless of symptom status early on after the exposure.* The rationale of expanded testing is to improve contact tracing and more aggressively identify infection, recognizing that some portion of persons with infection will not (yet) be symptomatic.

The optimal timing of this nasal swab testing depends on whether the exposure occurs with a patient encounter or a non-patient exposure. In a discrete patient exposure, the exposed person should be tested 2-3 days after the exposure (while they are in quarantine) to help inform early on whether there is (potentially asymptomatic) disease transmission. In other exposures (non-patient), the goal is generally to test as soon as possible after the exposure to understand who might be the (alpha) source for the infection. A negative result of this test does not change the need to quarantine for the 14-day period.

Masks. The final topic is the role of masks in helping to reduce the risk of transmission. There is ever-increasing data that masks are quite useful. They clearly limit the spread from the source which can be important in the workplace given that persons may be asymptomatic, at least initially, and still be contagious to others. There is also some more preliminary evidence that masking with a basic cloth mask can help reduce the risk to the wearer. Surgical masks likely are more protecting than a basic cloth face cover. Of course, the use of an N95 or equivalent provides exceptional protection. We continue to monitor the science and will do our best to communicate responsibly on the balance of evidence.