

## **What happens to a positive case of COVID-19?**

Stephanie Ler, RS, MPH, Richland County Health Department Public Information Officer

April 17, 2020

Now that Richland County has three confirmed positive cases of COVID-19, many are asking the question, “So what now? What happens when someone is positive?”.

Let’s take a step back, and start with what happens when someone is tested.

So what happens when a person is tested? Once a person is tested, they will be instructed to stay home and quarantine while they await their test results. The tested person should not leave to run any errands. Public health officials will instruct the person to begin making a list of potential close contacts. Factors that are considered when determine close contacts are the amount of time spent with the contact, how physically close the case was to the contact, and whether the case had active symptoms at the time of the contact.

If the person’s test results come back as negative, the person will be asked to remain at home in quarantine until at least 24 hours after their symptoms clear. Although the person has been cleared from COVID-19, they sought healthcare because they were sick with something, and sick people should stay home, rest and get better. This still means they should not be leaving their home for errands or other purposes, other than to seek emergency medical care when necessary. The individual should work with their employer to determine when they may return to work.

If the person’s test results come back as positive, the person will be instructed to isolate at home. Isolation means that a person who is sick stays at home, away from others, including those who live within the same household, for the duration of their illness. The person should ask a trusted friend or relative to assist in delivering food and necessary supplies for the duration of the isolation, as the person must remain isolated at home. If this is not feasible, public health may assist. The tested person will be instructed to notify emergency services that they have tested positive for COVID-19 should they call 911.

The positive case may be released from isolation after 72 hours fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medicines; and other symptoms have improved, and at least 7 days have passed since the development of the first symptoms. Public health officials will check in on positive cases via telephone regularly.

Public health officials will use the tested person’s contact list to notify the contact of their exposure. The contact will simply be told that they were named as a contact to a positive case. The name or any other identifying information will not be provided to the contact as these are part of the case’s protected health record. This is the same process for investigating other communicable disease, such as sexually transmitted infections.

Those who were named as a contact to the positive case will be asked to quarantine at home for 14 days, and monitor their health daily, checking for the development of a fever, cough or shortness of

breath. Public health officials will check in on those under quarantine regularly via telephone. After 14 days, if the contact does not develop symptoms, public health officials may release them from quarantine, and they may return to work in essential services, and run necessary errands.

Those who were not named as a contact and are not notified by public health should not take any action. If you were not contacted by public health officials a shortly after the report of the positive case was released, you should assume you were not exposed, and should continue to follow standard precautions, including staying home and avoiding contact with others.

The public will be notified of a positive case of COVID-19 in our community on the Health Department's Facebook page and through the local newspapers. It is important that community members rely on the facts provided by public health officials to inform their actions.

If you have concerns regarding COVID-19, contact the Health Department's COVID-19 Information Line at 406-433-6947.