

## Stay home if you have a respiratory tract infection – changes in isolation practices

*The rapidly escalating coronavirus situation requires infected persons to self-isolate and notify any persons they have been in close contact with about their exposure. Persons who have tested positive for COVID-19 can find instructions on what they should do on the websites of municipalities. Isolation decisions issued under the Communicable Diseases Act will be abandoned as primary proof of having contracted COVID-19 previously.*

### Isolation decisions issued by communicable disease authorities have lost their effectiveness

The Omicron variant has become the main coronavirus strain and it has caused a rapid increase in daily infections since the beginning of December. As a result, coronavirus testing, contact tracing and primary healthcare services are extremely busy. It may take several days to get access to testing carried out by healthcare services.

Even before symptoms appear, the Omicron variant is causing significant infection rates and with a delay in accessing testing, most of the further infections have already occurred by the time that the communicable disease authorities become aware of the test results. This means that there are no epidemiological grounds to order the infected person to self-isolate to prevent further infections. Infections confirmed with a home test are never reported to the communicable disease authorities.

According to [the instructions published](#) by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare on 13 January 2022, people exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 must avoid contact with people other than those living in the same household for a minimum of five days. In the current epidemic situation, the communicable disease authorities increasingly often do not become aware of an infection until the isolation period has already ended. The spread of infections cannot be prevented with decisions made afterwards.

### Home tests and avoiding contact with others help curb the epidemic

Responsible actions by the municipality's residents are necessary for protecting people close to them, slowing down the epidemic, reducing the burden on hospitals and keeping the people around us safe. Even if you only have minor symptoms, staying home and quickly informing those with whom you have had close contact of their potential exposure is now more important than ever.

The National Institute for Health and Welfare released [new instructions](#) on isolation related to COVID-19 on 13 January 2022. The updated instructions are available on municipalities' websites. Everyone must follow the recommendations and restrictions in force, even if they do not have symptoms.

Persons whose coronavirus infection has been confirmed through laboratory testing will receive instructions by text message. Instructions for those who have received positive test results, as well as their friends and family, are also available on municipalities' websites.

### Risks groups are given priority in coronavirus testing

According to the most recent national [preparedness plan for a pandemic](#), published before the coronavirus pandemic, it is no longer necessary to identify the cause of disease for every individual patient during the pandemic phase; instead, the investigation into the cause of disease must focus on patients who are severely ill.

Because of this, testing carried out by healthcare services currently focuses on groups that are at high risk for the severe form of COVID-19 and employees of healthcare and social services, among others. For further instructions on who should seek testing by healthcare services, please see municipalities' websites.

### Isolation decisions will mostly no longer be issued

According to the Communicable Diseases Act, the physician in charge of communicable diseases in the municipality or hospital district may order a person to be isolated if there is an obvious risk of the spread of the disease and it cannot be prevented by other means.

A decision to restrict an individual's fundamental rights is used as a last resort to curb the epidemic. Any restrictions on fundamental rights must be effective and necessary to reach the objective. According to a statement issued by the National Institute for Health and Welfare on 17 January, the spread of infections can no longer be slowed down with the test–trace–isolate–treat model used in the hybrid strategy. Therefore, the epidemiological grounds required by the Communicable Diseases Act for extensive isolation decisions no longer exist.

### Applying normal sick leave practices

It is important for all persons with symptoms of a respiratory tract infection to be able to stay home from work without concerns about loss of income. A need to compensate loss of income does not constitute grounds to order a person to self-isolate. Employers do not have the right to require their employees to present an isolation decision. Any loss of income must be compensated in other ways. Examples of replacement practices include normal sickness allowance practices or the employees expanded right to be absent with a simple notification, without requiring a doctor's note. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is looking into the matter.

In the future, isolation decisions issued by the physician in charge of communicable diseases will only be used in situations in which an administrative decision can genuinely prevent further infections. Municipal communicable diseases units will also continue combatting the epidemic with other means at their disposal.

*This practice will be implemented in stages in the HUS-are in Espoo, Helsinki, Hyvinkää, Järvenpää, Kauniainen, Kerava, Mäntsälä, Nurmijärvi, Pornainen, Porvoo, Sipoo, Tuusula and Vantaa, starting from 21 January 2022.*

*A similar practice is already implemented or will be within the next few days in the Hospital Districts of Central Finland, Pirkanmaa, Northern Ostrobothnia, Northern Savo, Southwest Finland and Turku.*

### References:

[Epidemiological situation and possible needs for changes to the COVID-19 strategy](#). National Institute for Health and Welfare, 17 January 2022.

[There is usually no need to be tested for mild symptoms – avoid contacts for five days and follow instructions in force in your area](#), National Institute for Health and Welfare, 13 January 2022  
[Situation assessment by the National Institute for Health and Welfare at the beginning of 2022](#), National

Institute for Health and Welfare, 5 January 2022.

[National preparedness plan for an influenza pandemic](#), Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2012.

**Further information for the media:**

Hospital District of Helsinki and Uusimaa: Chief physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Asko Järvinen, tel. 050 427 0330, [asko.jarvinen@hus.fi](mailto:asko.jarvinen@hus.fi)

Espoo: Director of Health Services Markus Paananen, tel. 040 636 8983, [markus.paananen@espoo.fi](mailto:markus.paananen@espoo.fi)

Helsinki: Chief Physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases, Sanna Isosomppi, tel. +358 9 310 51217, [sanna.isosomppi@hel.fi](mailto:sanna.isosomppi@hel.fi)

Kauniainen: Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Helena Kemppainen, tel. 050 810 500, [helena.kemppainen@kauniainen.fi](mailto:helena.kemppainen@kauniainen.fi)

Kerava: Acting Chief Physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases, Tuure Ärling, tel. +358 40 318 3440, [tuure.arling@kerava.fi](mailto:tuure.arling@kerava.fi)

Keusote: Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases, Paula Kosonen, tel. +358 50 4970 989, [paula.kosonen@keusote.fi](mailto:paula.kosonen@keusote.fi)

Kirkkonummi:

Porvoo: Deputy Chief Physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases, Jeff Westerlund, tel. +358 50 676 1391, [jeff.westerlund@porvoo.fi](mailto:jeff.westerlund@porvoo.fi)

Sipoo: Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases, Stephanie Gustavsen, tel. +358 50 343 3699, [stephanie.gustavsen@sipoo.fi](mailto:stephanie.gustavsen@sipoo.fi)

Vantaa: Chief Physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Kirsi Valtonen, tel. +358 50 312 1651, [kirsi.valtonen@vantaa.fi](mailto:kirsi.valtonen@vantaa.fi)

Central Finland Hospital District: Chief physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Jaana Leppäaho-Lakka, tel. 040 636 7578, [jaana.leppaaho-lakka@ksshp.fi](mailto:jaana.leppaaho-lakka@ksshp.fi)

Pirkanmaa Hospital District: Chief physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Jaana Syrjänen, tel. 050 410 7760, [jaana.syrjanen@pshp.fi](mailto:jaana.syrjanen@pshp.fi)

Tampere: Epidemiologist, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Sirpa Räsänen, tel. 040 800 7562, [sirpa.rasanen@tampere.fi](mailto:sirpa.rasanen@tampere.fi)

Northern Ostrobothnia Hospital District: Head of Department, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Teija Puhto, tel. 08 3152011, [teija.puhto@ppshp.fi](mailto:teija.puhto@ppshp.fi)

Hospital District of Northern Savo: Chief physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Irma Koivula, tel. 017 173311, [irma.koivula@kuh.fi](mailto:irma.koivula@kuh.fi)

Turku: Chief physician, Physician in Charge of Communicable Diseases Jutta Peltoniemi, tel. 040 595 3682, [jutta.peltoniemi@turku.fi](mailto:jutta.peltoniemi@turku.fi)