

COVID-19 Reinfection advice

The Ministry of Health has updated its guidance on reinfection following a review of international and local evidence about immunity and the emergence of new variants in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Reports of possible reinfection in Aotearoa New Zealand have increased over the last few months, corresponding to the spread of Omicron in the community. It's likely that this will increase as new subvariants begin to circulate more widely.

The previous clinical guidance on managing possible COVID-19 reinfection was issued on 5 May 2022. At that time, we recommended no further testing, even if symptomatic, within 90 days of a prior infection. This advice aligned with the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Self-isolation Requirements and Permitted Work) Order 2022, which didn't allow a person to be defined as a COVID-19 case again within 90 days of first becoming a case.

The Order has now been updated, which enables a person who tests positive for COVID-19 again within 29-90 days of first becoming a case, to be considered a new case.

Key messages on Reinfection advice:

- The Ministry of Health has updated its advice on getting infected again with COVID-19 within 90 days of a previous COVID-19 infection, in light of increasing evidence that reinfections can occur earlier than 90 days.
- If a person develops new COVID-19 symptoms, and it's 29 days or more since their previous infection, it's possible that it's a reinfection with COVID-19 and they should take a rapid antigen test.
- If it is 28 days or less since the last infection, there's no need to test.
- The latest evidence shows that getting COVID-19 again within a short period of time can happen. But it's unclear how common it is. Reinfection is also more likely as new variants spread among the community.
- COVID-19 like symptoms may well be caused by other infections like the common cold, flu or a chest infection.
- For most people illness caused by reinfection is likely to be no more severe than a first infection, but they can experience different symptoms.
- Evidence on reinfections is evolving rapidly. We are constantly monitoring what's happening internationally and updating our guidance to ensure it is in line with the latest public health advice.

Public Advice on Reinfection:

- If you've had COVID-19 in the last 28 days and feel unwell with COVID-19 symptoms again, you don't need to take a RAT. It's likely your symptoms relate to the initial infection or are caused by a different viral infection. Stay home and recover.

- If you get new COVID-19 symptoms and it is 29 days or more after your first infection you should take a RAT and follow advice for a first infection. Don't forget to record your RAT result positive or negative on [MyCovidRecord](#)
- If you test positive for COVID-19 at 29 days or more, this will be treated as a reinfection and you must isolate for 7 days while you recover. Day 0 is the day your symptoms started or when you tested positive, whichever came first.
- If your result is negative, you might still have COVID-19 but your symptoms could also be caused by another infection such as the flu or another virus.
- If your symptoms continue you should repeat a RAT test 48 hours later. If this is still negative, then stay at home until at least 24 hours after your symptoms resolve.
- At the start of a COVID-19 infection it may take some days before a RAT can detect the virus, even if you have symptoms. Please stay home and retest again 48 hours later if you still have symptoms.
- If you test positive and have underlying conditions or feel your symptoms are getting worse, call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 or your doctor/healthcare provider.
- Your household contacts will also need to isolate until your 7 days are complete as long as they have no new or worsening symptoms, and a negative day 7 test.
- They will not need to isolate if they have had COVID-19 in the last 90 days and are recovered or if they have completed their isolation as a household contact in the last 10 days.
- Household contacts should watch for symptoms and if any develop, isolate take a RAT test, and Follow the advice above. They should still take precautions when out and about, wearing a mask when indoors; not visiting places with vulnerable people like aged care and disability facilities, and hospitals; and avoiding crowded indoor events.

Q&A on reinfection for the public:

Q. What is reinfection?

Reinfection refers to the detection of a second, or subsequent COVID-19 infection, regardless of the variant involved.

Q. Are reinfections milder?

Not necessarily. Some people may have milder symptoms and others more severe symptoms. There is no evidence that people reinfected with COVID-19 are more likely to end up in hospital. The severity can depend on many factors, including the variant involved and vaccination status.

Q. Why can people get reinfected?

As immunity from the vaccine and a previous COVID-19 infection wanes reinfections become more likely. Reinfection is more common with new variants and subvariants that are better at evading the immune system. Prior immunity may be less effective at providing full protection against infection with new variants and sub-variants.

Being up to date with vaccinations, including a second booster dose if eligible, remains the best protection against severe COVID-19 disease. You can also reduce the risk of being

reinfecting by wearing a mask in indoor settings and avoiding close contact and places which are crowded or poorly ventilated.

Q. I've recently had COVID-19, can I get it again?

The latest evidence shows that getting COVID-19 again within a short period of time can happen. But it's unclear how common it is. Reinfection may become more common as new Omicron subvariants or other variants spread among the community.

Q. I've just recovered from COVID-19 and am feeling unwell again. What should I do?

If you get new COVID-19 symptoms and it is 29 days or more after your first infection, it's possible that it's a COVID-19 reinfection and you should get tested. Follow advice for a first infection if you test positive.

If it's 28 days or less since a previous COVID-19 infection your symptoms may be related to your initial infection. Stay home until you are well and for 24 hours after you no longer have symptoms.

It is worrying when you feel unwell for so long, but it is not uncommon for people recovering from COVID-19 to have symptoms that come and go for some time afterwards.

If you have an underlying health condition or have symptoms that are getting worse, call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 or your doctor/healthcare provider.

Read [information for people who are considered at higher risk of severe disease from COVID-19 and their whanau](#).

Q. I'm feeling unwell with COVID-19 like symptoms. Should I take a rapid antigen test?

You can take a rapid antigen test at any time and load the result into My Covid Record. It will only be considered a reinfection at day 29 or more.

If a person develops new COVID-19 symptoms, and it's 29 days or more since their previous infection, it's possible that it's a reinfection with COVID-19 and they should take a rapid antigen test.

If it is 28 days or less since the last infection, it's unlikely to be a reinfection. There's no need to test.

Q. Why do you advise not to test within 28 days?

Within 28 days your symptoms are most likely due to lasting effects of your initial infection or a different new respiratory infection. A new COVID-19 infection is difficult to diagnose within 28 days because symptoms, viral levels and test positivity may fluctuate during this time.

Q. It's more than 28 days since my last infection and I've tested positive again. Do I need to isolate?

Yes. if you have a reinfection with COVID-19 you will need to follow all the public health guidelines and isolate for 7 days.

For advice read [what to do if you have COVID-19](#).

Q. Do the people I live with need to isolate again as household contacts?

Yes. Household contacts will also need to re-isolate unless they had been a case within the previous 90 days, or they have completed isolation as a household in the last 10 days. They should also take a RAT on days 3 and 7.

Q. Will I be able to get the same support that I got the first time I got infected?

Yes, if it is 29 days or more since your last COVID-19 infection you will be able to access the same support as for the first infection.

Most people will be able to manage self-isolation with help from whānau and friends, but there is help available for you and your household if you need it.

Read [help when you are self-isolating](#).

Q. Why have you made this change now?

We are continually monitoring international evidence on reinfection and updating our advice. Reinfection definitions vary between countries and is a rapidly moving field with frequent updates on new variants and evidence about immunity from prior infection and vaccination.

Reinfection has not been a significant issue to date in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, with new variants now circulating across the motu, it is likely to become more common.

Reports of possible reinfection in Aotearoa have increased over the last few months, corresponding to the spread of Omicron in the community. We also know that immunity from vaccination and previous infection reduces over time, therefore the potential for reinfection increases.

Q. Why can people not be reinfected within 28 days?

Early reinfection (28 days or less from initial diagnosis) is thought to be unusual. When recovering from COVID-19, many people have symptoms that come and go for a period of time afterwards. Therefore, new symptoms within 28 days are most likely to be related to the original diagnosis of COVID or caused by a new viral infection.

If a person is not getting better, or becoming increasingly unwell, they should call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 or your doctor/healthcare provider.

Q. Why do I have to isolate again when I've already isolated for my first COVID-19 infection?

If you test positive for COVID-19, you and your household contacts need to isolate from the community to help stop the spread of the virus. You are just as infectious with a reinfection as you are with your first infection.

Read [more about isolating from others](#).

Q. I think I have COVID-19 but the RAT keeps showing negative. What should I do?

If your result is negative, your symptoms could still be due to COVID-19 but they could also be caused by another infection such as the flu or another virus. Please stay home and retest again 48 hours later.

At the start of a COVID-19 infection it may take some days before a rapid antigen test (RAT) can detect the virus, even if you have symptoms.

If you have underlying conditions or feel your symptoms are getting worse, call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 or your doctor/healthcare provider.

Read [information for people who are considered at higher risk of severe disease from COVID-19 and their whanau.](#)

Read [about COVID-19 test results and their accuracy.](#)