



New Coronavirus

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FAQs Test criteria and contact tracing

On 16 April, the Federal Council decided to begin a phased easing of measures aimed at protecting the population against the new coronavirus as of the end of April. Each phase must be accompanied by an appropriate set of precautionary measures to minimise the risk of spreading the virus. It is possible to begin easing measures because the number of new infections, hospitalisations and deaths has been falling since the beginning of April.

The aim now is to continue to bring down the number of new infections and to keep the number of cases low over the coming weeks and months. Only then will it be possible to ease measures further. The federal government has worked with the cantons to draw up a plan for the containment phase, which includes the following steps:

- Ideally, every new case of infection should be identified, and the person placed in isolation to prevent new outbreaks of infection. That is why anyone who experiences even mild symptoms will now be tested and placed in isolation if the test is positive. People living in the same household or who have otherwise been in close contact with that person will be placed in quarantine. Only then can the epidemic be controlled.
- If the number of cases continues to fall, each new case will once again be traced. This is achieved through contact tracing, one of the most important instruments in containing the epidemic. The cantons are responsible for setting up an interviewing system and ensuring the necessary resources. Anyone who has come into close contact (less than 2 metres for longer than 15 minutes) during the infectious period with a person who has tested positive, will be placed in quarantine.

Identifying and isolating each new case of infection

1. Up until now, the criteria regarding who could be tested for the new coronavirus were strict. Why is it that everyone displaying symptoms is now again being tested? During the intensive phase of the epidemic strict measures were put in place to prevent the spread of the virus and protect people at especially high risk. Schools and businesses were closed and we were instructed to follow the rules on hygiene and social distancing. The testing regime focused on people with severe symptoms and risk groups, where laboratory diagnosis was vital in deciding on the further course of treatment.

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As the epidemic wave passes, the number of new cases of infection continues to fall. The measures put in place to protect against the virus are gradually being lifted. Now we have to make sure that the number of new infections doesn't rise again. In order to rapidly identify every new infection, everyone displaying symptoms of the illness are to be tested. The cantonal medical officers can also decide to have people in hospitals or care homes tested to prevent and control the spread of the virus within the institution.

2. I've got a cold and a sore throat – will I now be tested?

The test is recommended for anyone with the following symptoms: an acute respiratory disease such as a cough, sore throat, shortness of breath – with or without a high temperature, feverishness or muscle ache, or a sudden loss of sense of taste or smell. If you experience any of these symptoms, you should contact your doctor or take the Coronavirus Check (online) and follow the instructions.

3. Where can I get myself tested?

The cantons have a range of testing procedures in place. If you would like to get yourself tested, you generally need to be referred by a doctor. In some cantons, it is enough to present the result of a coronavirus check. If you have symptoms, you can get yourself tested at any number of medical practices, hospitals or special test centres, although you may have to register in advance.

4. What happens if I test positive?

If the test is positive, you will need to go into isolation so as to prevent spreading the disease to others. The isolation period is at least 10 days and will be checked by the cantonal authorities.

5. How much does a test cost and who pays for it?

A test costs around 100 francs. Tests for people with strong symptoms or who are at high risk of experiencing complications will be covered by your health insurance – as is the case for other diagnostic tests; however, the test is not exempt from the deductible.

Tests for people with mild symptoms and for people not in the at-risk category are intended to monitor the epidemic. The costs of these tests is borne by the cantons.

Contact tracing – tracking down contacts

In order to keep the epidemic under control, ideally every new infection needs to be traced. Where has the person been in the last few days, who have they been in close contact with, who could they have potentially infected? Tracking the chain of infection by means of targeted contact tracing is key to preventing the epidemic from flaring up again in the long term.

6. Why is contact tracing only now being reintroduced? The cantons were doing this at the start of the epidemic.

Contact tracing in each individual case is extremely time consuming. The federal and cantonal authorities believe that consistent contact tracing will again be feasible as soon as

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the number of new cases of infection per day in Switzerland falls below around 100. Each person infected is generally assumed to have been in contact with around 20 people, each of whom has to be notified. The cantons are responsible for contact tracing and can draw on support staff.

7. Who is considered to be a close contact who may potentially be infected?

A person is considered to have been in close contact if they came into contact with someone confirmed as having the virus during the infectious period (i.e. after symptoms developed and 48 hours before). Close contact means contact lasting more than 15 minutes at a distance of less than 2 metres without protective measures such as a face mask or protective screen.

8. Who will notify me if I've been in contact with someone who is infected?

The cantonal authorities will notify those concerned and tell them what they need to do.

9. I've been in contact with someone who is infected – do I have to go into quarantine?

Yes. Close contacts have to go into quarantine to prevent the possible further spread of the virus. The cantonal medical officer orders the quarantine.

If symptoms occur within 10 days, the doctor will arrange a test. If no symptoms occur during this time, it is safe to assume that the person has not been infected. The quarantine will be lifted.

10. What role can the Proximity Tracing app play?

Digital applications can supplement the traditional contact tracing methods employed by the cantons and help to identify the contacts of newly infected persons. This is particularly true for smartphone apps that use Bluetooth radio technology to record contacts. Bluetooth makes it possible to trace who has come into contact with a person who has tested positive. Anyone who has been in contact with the person who has tested positive for longer than 15 minutes and at a distance of less than 2 metres will receive a notification. They are asked to call the Coronavirus Infoline mentioned in the app to clarify the next steps.

If the doctor considers a coronavirus test necessary and if it is positive, a period of isolation is ordered. The cantonal medical service would then provide further information.

11. Will I officially be on sick leave while I'm in isolation or quarantine? Will I still be paid?

Yes, you will be provided with a medical certificate if you are placed in isolation by your doctor or the cantonal authorities. In the case of quarantine, the order must be issued by the cantonal authorities. If you go into quarantine voluntarily because you have been in close physical contact with someone who is infected, you should contact your doctor or call the FOPH Infoline for further details.

12. How long will the containment phase last?

The aim of the measures in the containment phase is to prevent a renewed outbreak and sharp rise in the number of infections over an extended period (until a vaccine becomes available, i.e. for the next 6 to 18 months). Should the number of cases rise again, it would no longer be possible to consistently trace contacts, meaning that the decisions to ease measures would have to be reviewed and reversed if necessary.

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13. What if the number of new cases of infection were to rise rapidly again instead of falling?

Precautionary measures will be adapted depending on how the situation develops. If the situation were to deteriorate, plans to further ease measures could be postponed and measures that have already been relaxed could be partially re-imposed.

14. How can we prevent travellers from bringing the new coronavirus into Switzerland?

Plans are still being drawn up and will have to be coordinated with our neighbouring countries. The overriding aim must be to identify and isolate all infected persons to prevent the virus from being brought into the country. At the same time, we have to make sure that Swiss citizens don't take the virus with them on their travels to other countries.

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