

Why don't most people with COVID need to test for another 30 days, even if they're re-exposed?

February 11 2022, by Jaya A R Dantas



Credit: Karolina Grabowska from Pexels

While omicron continues to infect people across Australia and the world, many people who've already had COVID will likely be re-exposed to the

virus.

Depending on your local rules, if you're exposed again [within 30](#) days of your last infection, you're unlikely to need to isolate or get another COVID [test](#).

In some countries, you may not need to [re-test for 90 days](#), unless you develop new symptoms.

So why is this the case?

What's the incubation period for omicron?

The [time](#) between exposure to the virus and symptoms for COVID is [between one and 14 days](#). This lag time is known as the "[incubation period](#)."

However, most people display symptoms by day five or six after exposure.

Emerging evidence suggests the median incubation period for omicron is [even shorter](#). In [US](#) and [European](#) studies, the median incubation time for omicron was three days.

More reinfections with omicron

Research suggests omicron is more capable than past variants of reinfecting people who have already had COVID.

A study from the Imperial College London's COVID-19 response team estimated the risk of reinfection with omicron to be [5.4 times higher](#) than with delta. So people who've had a prior COVID infection, from

any variant before omicron, were five times more likely to be re-infected during the [omicron](#) wave than the delta wave.

Omicron appears significantly more likely to [evade the natural immunity](#) people build up from past infections.

For those who have been infected:

What we know now about COVID immunity after infection—including omicron and delta variants

<https://t.co/pEP1DWwXSP> via [@ConversationEDU](#)

— Professor Adrian Esterman (@profesterman) [January 30, 2022](#)

How long should I wait before re-testing?

[Global studies](#) indicate you don't need to re-test for 30–90 days after a COVID positive test if you're re-exposed, depending on the jurisdiction.

This is because most people develop some immunity after recovering from the virus, so have a low risk of becoming re-infected in the short term.

A large study undertaken in one of Italy's former COVID hotspots reveals people who've had COVID should be tested again, if re-exposed, only after at least [four weeks](#).

This study found the virus takes an average 30 days to clear from the body after the first positive test result and an average [36 days after symptoms first appear](#).

In [Queensland](#), you don't need to be re-tested or isolate if you're exposed again within 28 days after ending isolating, regardless of symptoms. In

[New South Wales](#) it's also 28 days and in [Victoria](#) it's 30 days, but you'll need to get another test if you develop fresh symptoms.

If you come into contact with someone with COVID after this time frame, you'll need to self-isolate, test and follow local advice.

This time frame is different in the United Kingdom. Following a substantial [clinical review](#) of evidence and testing data in the UK, the government now advises waiting [at least 90 days](#) after a positive test before retesting—unless you develop new symptoms.

Part of the rationale is you have a low chance of becoming reinfected within 90 days after testing positive. So it's highly likely a positive test in this window would be a false result due to viral shedding, meaning you'd have to unnecessarily isolate.

The UK Health Security Agency defines COVID reinfection as having a positive test [more than 90 days](#) after your last positive test.

You should still get a booster dose

The evidence for the immunity we get from COVID infection is more limited than that for the [immunity we get from vaccines](#).

[Growing evidence](#) also suggests getting vaccinated after having COVID significantly improves protection and further lowers the risk of reinfection.

So the [need for boosters](#) remains strong.

However, we should keep in mind the huge issue of [vaccine equity](#), as many people including some [health workers](#), the elderly and those immuno-compromised in low and [middle income countries](#) haven't even

received their first two doses yet.

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