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In reply, please refer to:
File:

May 22, 2026

Medical Advisory: Interim Return-to-Work (RTW) Guidance for Healthcare Personnel with COVID-19, Influenza, RSV, and Other Acute Viral Respiratory Infections in Hawai'i

Dear Healthcare Provider:

The Hawai'i Department of Health (HDOH) has updated return-to-work guidance for Healthcare Personnel (HCP). New guidance considers prior recommendations prepared by the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC). The HICPAC was in the process of updating the 1998 "Infection Control in Healthcare Personnel" guideline prior to the dissolution of HICPAC in June 2025. The purpose of this guidance is to reduce the risk of transmission of viral respiratory infections to patients, visitors, and other HCP while balancing considerations of patient safety and workforce fitness for duty with prolonged work exclusions and workforce strain.

This guidance applies to HCP with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus, and other acute respiratory infections, except for known or suspected infections with pathogens for which distinct public health guidance is available--e.g., novel influenza A virus (including H5N1 avian Influenza) or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

Acute Respiratory Illness (ARI) is a **non-specific syndrome** that can be caused by infection with different respiratory pathogens that typically involves the airways within the nose and throat and that may or may not include fever or feverishness.

An ARI is generally defined as:

- **The presence of two or more signs or symptoms such as fever, cough, runny nose or nasal congestion, or sore throat.**

Additional considerations may be taken for HCP with acute respiratory infections who are moderately or severely immunocompromised and therefore might shed viruses for prolonged periods. These individuals should consult with occupational or employee health to determine when they may return to work and discontinue masking.

To maximize patient and HCP safety, return-to-work protocols for HCP should focus on symptom-based exclusion and comprehensive source control.

Return-to-Work (RTW) Guidance for Healthcare Workers with Acute Respiratory Infection

Healthcare workers with acute respiratory infection (ARI) symptoms or a positive ARI test may return to work when:

- **At least 3 days** have passed since symptom onset (or positive test if asymptomatic), and
- For **at least 24 hours**, they have been fever-free without medication, have been experiencing improving symptoms, and feel well enough to work.

Upon return:

- Wear a mask through **day 10**.
- Follow strict adherence to hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.

Note: Day 0 = symptom onset or positive test (if asymptomatic).

Testing is not required to return to work. All HCP should be encouraged to stay up to date on influenza and other recommended immunizations and follow health care facility policies for source control masking.

Facilities may consider temporary reassignment or exclusion of HCP who care for or work on a unit with patients at the highest risk for a severe illness due to viral infections, such as moderately or severely immunocompromised patients, for 7-10 days after symptom onset or until symptom resolution, whichever is longer. Examples of these locations may include hematology/oncology, reverse isolation settings, and transplant units. The healthcare facility administrator should determine where these additional measures apply.

Facilities should consult with their infection prevention team and ensure staff training on the revised protocols. Please note, these are recommendations, not regulations, and facilities must continue to follow all applicable regulatory requirements. Skilled nursing facilities should continue to follow guidance provided by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Mahalo for continuing to keep our patients, residents, and staff safe.

Sincerely,



Sarah K. Kemble, MD
State Epidemiologist

References:

- California Department of Public Health. [Interim Work Exclusion Guidance for Healthcare Personnel with COVID-19, Influenza, and Other Acute Respiratory Viral Infections](#). January 2025.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Glossary of Influenza \(Flu\) Terms](#).
- Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee. [Infection Control in Healthcare Personnel Workgroup Presentation](#). November 14-15, 2025.
- Washington State Department of Health. [Interim Return to Work Guidance for Healthcare Personnel with COVID-19, Influenza, RSV, and Other Acute Viral Respiratory Infections](#). October 2025.