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CDC Updated Guidance does not Imply Immunity to Reinfection

People who are infected with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) do not necessarily have immunity to reinfection for 3 months, said CDC.

It is possible that people may continue to test positive for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) for up to 3 months following diagnosis and not transmit the infection to others. But, this does not imply that infection confers immunity for that period.

The confusion had emanated from an August 3 update to CDC's isolation guidance. The guidance stated the following:

"Who requires quarantine?"

People who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 – excluding people who have had COVID-19 within the past 3 months.

People who have tested positive for COVID-19 do not need to quarantine or get tested again for up to 3 months as long as they do not develop symptoms again. People who develop symptoms again within 3 months of their first bout of COVID-19 may need to be tested again, if there is no other cause identified for their symptoms."

One may read these statements as suggesting that those who are recovering from COVID-19 would possibly be protected from reinfection for 3 months even with close exposure to infected people. Media reports took this as the agency is implying immunity.

However, a new statement from the CDC has condemned the media for misinterpreting its guidance. According to CDC, the guidance was about retesting, and not immunity.

The latest data indicate that retesting in the 3 months following initial infection is not required unless the person develops the symptoms of COVID-19 and the symptoms cannot be tied to another illness.

The CDC went on to update and state categorically that it is not known if someone can be reinfected with COVID-19. According to the CDC, individuals who were previously infected with COVID-19 may continue to have low levels of virus in their body for up to 3 months; hence, the positive test results even if they recovered from the virus.

The CDC, thus concluded that the duration of infection in the majority of patients is no more than 10 days following symptom onset, and no more than 20 days in those with severe illness or in severely immunocompromised individuals.

The agency also stated that there are no confirmed reports of reinfection within 3 months of initial infection.

The guidance recommends that if patients recovering from COVID-19 come in contact with a positive case and have new symptoms, they should isolate themselves, contact their healthcare provider and possibly undergo retesting. All the people, including those recovering from the infection, should follow the recommended interventions, including social distancing, wearing a face mask in public and washing of hands.

The CDC restated that people testing positive for COVID-19 should isolate for at least 10 days following symptom onset and until 24 hours after the fever subsides without the use of antipyretic medications.

(Source: Medpage Today)