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COVID Update January 31, 2022

This is a short update with COVID testing questions answered. It is taken from Dr. Jeremy Faust, 'Inside Medicine.'

Your at-home rapid test questions answered. Are five days of isolation with Omicron really enough?

Recent CDC guidelines have understandably confused a lot of people. Let's clear it up

Last month, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released new guidelines for the general public saying that those testing positive for SARS-CoV-2 could end their isolation after 5 days—regardless of vaccination status—provided they were asymptomatic or had symptoms that were improving.

A new genre on social media quickly emerged: people posting photographs of the results of their positive at-home rapid antigen tests, well after day 5 since diagnosis. Some were still symptomatic, many were not. Colleagues, random friends, strangers, and even CNBC's Jim Cramer were in my DMs asking what to do with their positive results.

Could they end their isolation after 5 days, even if their rapid tests remained positive? No, I told them. But I couldn't blame them for asking. The CDC's guideline *seemed* to imply that. Specifically, the CDC said that infected people could end their isolation after 5 days (if asymptomatic or if symptoms had resolved) *without* further testing. But that's not the same thing as saying nobody is contagious after 5 days. That's not the same thing as saying to ignore a positive rapid test taken 5 days after diagnosis. But the confusion was understandable.

From the perspective of making sure society doesn't grind to a screeching halt during a Covid-19 surge, the CDC's guideline actually makes some sense. Better to have a few mildly contagious people out there wearing masks and keep grocery stores open, the reasoning seems to go, rather than insisting on longer isolation periods and having everyone clamoring for food if too many people get infected at once. But through the lens of personal safety, the new guidelines have proven themselves to be pretty inscrutable, even to educated people.

With free rapid antigen tests now being delivered to US mailboxes (finally!), let me clarify the answers to the most frequently asked questions and tell you what you need to know about your rapid antigen test results.

Positive at-home rapid antigen tests. Key concepts: A positive at-home rapid antigen test at any time means you must consider yourself **contagious**.

- It doesn't matter when you were exposed to or diagnosed with SARS-CoV-2. **If the rapid is positive, you're contagious.**

- It doesn't matter whether you are boosted, vaccinated, unvaccinated, or any of these in combination with a prior infection. (Note: this may change, but for now, there are too many unknowns). **If the rapid is positive, you're contagious.**

- It doesn't matter whether you have symptoms, whether your symptoms are getting better, getting worse, or even whether you ever had symptoms at all. To repeat: a positive rapid should not be ignored due to the absence of symptoms. **If the rapid is positive, you're contagious.**

- It doesn't matter whether the test result line is faint or strong. **If the rapid is positive, you're contagious.**

- Rapid antigen tests still work for Omicron. Contrary to rumors, new data [confirm](#) that you don't need to swab your throat. Nasal swabs, correctly done, remain adequate.

- False positives are possible. The best way to check for this is via a follow-up PCR test administered by a healthcare professional.

Initial vaccines and boosters can be scheduled at:

www.vaccines.gov

or

www.Vaccines.nh.gov

Yours in Health,

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