

## Newsletter 18 August

### Isolation vs Quarantine

I am pleased to report that so far, neither my staff, my family nor I have had any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. We have settled well into the gym area (which is closed to the public) at Mutualpark, and I am seeing face to face patients daily. All COVID-19 protocols are strictly adhered to, in order to protect everyone.

Recently I have had queries about the isolation period protocol changing from 14 days to 10 days, so decided to explain this more fully.

Isolation means that when you develop symptoms of COVID-19 or you have had a positive test result for SARS-CoV-2 (the virus which causes the disease called COVID-19), even with no symptoms, you need to remain apart from other people. It is believed that you are infectious for 10 days (unless you have had a severe infection requiring admission to hospital). With a mild illness, after day 11 you can safely go to the shops and be around other people. Hand washing, wearing of masks and social distancing remain the cornerstones of infection prevention.

Quarantine means you have been exposed to an infectious person, knowingly or unknowingly, and you need to remain at home away from other people. The quarantine period remains at 14 days and has not changed. This is because the virus may be incubating, and symptoms may show at any time during the 14 day period. Should someone in quarantine get COVID-19 symptoms, they need to start their isolation period from the day of the onset of symptoms. They would also have been infectious 2-4 days before the onset of their symptoms (hence the benefit of already having been away from other people). So, yes, this means you could be separated from people for as long as 24 days!

Unfortunately, we cannot rely on a negative test to say you are safe, and don't have COVID-19, especially if you are exposed to vulnerable people like the elderly or those with chronic illnesses. There is a 27% false negative test result, where people actually do have COVID-19 but they tested negative. It is important not to test if you do not have symptoms. The latest guidelines in the Western Cape only allow testing for those people with symptoms who are older than 55 years, and all symptomatic persons with co-morbidities, as well as health care workers.

There is no need to retest at any stage once you have a positive test, as your test will remain positive for up to 6 weeks. This does not mean you are infectious for 6 weeks, but just that parts of the virus are still present in your body, so the SARS-CoV-2 test remains positive.

Sadly, we do not yet know whether one will be immune after infection, as the information is not consistent. We do think that there will be some immunity at least in the initial few weeks after an infection, but we need to wait for better data to be certain of this.

Just a reminder that SARS-CoV-2 is droplet spread and we breathe it in, or the droplets land on our nose, eyes or mouth when near an infected person. Fifteen minutes in the same room OR being face to face at less than 1.5 metres are both considered close contact. The risk of getting infected is reduced by wearing a mask, or being in a well-ventilated place, or being outdoors.

***So keep washing your hands, social distancing and wearing masks.***

Keep well, and stay safe.

Yours in health

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Dr Louise Wigen