



March 2, 2020

John Hellerstedt, MD  
Commissioner  
Texas Department of State Health Services  
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Austin, Texas 78756-3199

Dr. Hellerstedt:

We received your letter this morning regarding the Diamond Princess cruise ship passengers who are scheduled to leave Lackland today. Below is the information you requested regarding the status of the Diamond Princess cruise ship passengers currently under federal quarantine at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland. The individuals in this group fall into 2 categories:

- Passengers who have been asymptomatic for the required 14-day quarantine period are medically cleared to leave quarantine today.
- Passengers who developed symptoms during the quarantine and who were separated for isolation and were found positive for coronavirus.

**Category 1: Passengers who have been asymptomatic for the required 14-day quarantine period are medically cleared to leave quarantine today.** All passengers were monitored twice daily by CDC officials for fever and respiratory symptoms. Having no fever or respiratory symptoms during the 14-day incubation period of the virus, these individuals have achieved the federal requirements for release of quarantine, which are consistent with globally accepted standards. Testing is not required by the quarantine implementation; however, testing was offered to the cohort because of the unusual circumstances around the conditions on the ship. These people fall into two groups:

**Group 1: Passengers who have been asymptomatic for the required 14-day quarantine period with a negative coronavirus test** – People who arrived from the Diamond Princess cruise ship have been monitored twice a day by CDC officials for fever and respiratory symptoms. Those who do not present any symptoms are termed “asymptomatic.” A 14-day quarantine has been established to cover the time period during which someone with coronavirus would become ill. Individuals who have completed 14 days of quarantine, are asymptomatic, and have had a negative coronavirus test, are safe to return home. Individuals in this large cohort have tested negative for coronavirus and are currently asymptomatic.

**Group 2: Passengers who have been asymptomatic for the required 14-day quarantine period with no coronavirus testing** – People who arrived from the Diamond Princess cruise ship have been monitored twice a day by CDC officials for fever and respiratory symptoms. Those who do not present any symptoms are considered “asymptomatic.” A 14-day quarantine has been established to cover the time period during which someone with coronavirus would become ill.

- a. Eleven individuals in the group have not been tested for coronavirus and have remained asymptomatic. CDC offered voluntary testing, but individuals who declined also complete their quarantine for 14-day incubation period of the disease, and are safe to return home.
- b. Justification for the 14-day Quarantine
  - i. CDC continually reviews available scientific data on illness due to the virus causing the novel 2019 Coronavirus Disease and uses the globally accepted standard of 14 days as the duration for the incubation period. The incubation period is the time from exposure to the onset of illness. Most patients develop illness at around 5 to 6 days from their exposure. Among the persons under quarantine, all of the quarantined individuals have reached a 14-day period without fever or respiratory symptoms. Even though no testing is required for rescinding quarantine, most of the quarantined persons have additionally been tested and were negative.
  - ii. CDC has assessed the risks and health status daily. CDC assessed each of these persons today and has determined that these individuals are highly unlikely to pose a risk of coronavirus infection to the public upon release.
  - iii. All have been medically evaluated on March 2, 2020, and had no fever and had no symptoms of COVID-19 illness.
  - iv. CDC has determined that these individuals are cleared from federal quarantine and are highly unlikely to pose a risk to public health at this time, and that further monitoring for symptoms are not necessary.

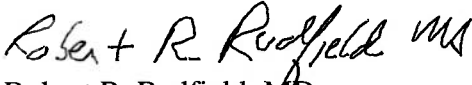
**Category 2: Passengers who developed symptoms during the quarantine and who were separated for isolation and were found positive for coronavirus** – People who arrived from the Diamond Princess cruise ship have been monitored twice a day by CDC officials for fever and respiratory symptoms. Once an individual has symptoms of coronavirus, they are considered a person under investigation (PUI) and taken off base to a medical facility for isolation, evaluation, and coronavirus testing. If the test results are positive, the individual is confirmed as having coronavirus. The guidance to date has required the patient to remain in isolation until free from symptoms, and having two negative tests more than 24 hours apart.

One individual met these criteria and was released only to learn that a pending test turned out to be positive; she was readmitted. For this individual, specimens were collected according to the CDC protocol. After her symptoms had resolved, specimen collections were started to determine that she had negative test results. The policy is that a person can have isolation precautions removed if there are two specimens that are negative, collected 24 hours apart. Her first specimen was negative. Her second specimen, which was collected 24 hours later, was inconclusive. Therefore, the protocol required a third specimen to be collected. Inconclusive results mean that the test is at the limit of detection, is neither positive nor negative, and needs to be repeated. While waiting on the results from the third specimen, the Infectious Disease Response Unit at TCID collected a subsequent fourth specimen without knowledge of the CDC team at Lackland. The prior confirmatory specimen (third specimen) was negative and, according to protocol, led to the release of the person. After the person was released, results of the fourth specimen were completed and showed a positive. Based on this last result, the patient was contacted and was returned to isolation at TCID. Having a positive test does not necessarily

mean the person is infectious; however, CDC acts on these results to assure that the person is isolated until evidence of negative tests.

**Category 3: Modification of CDC Protocol.** In light of what occurred with the above patient, CDC has modified its protocol in two ways. First, a previously symptomatic quarantine individual will only be released if that person has two *sequential* negative tests within 24 hours. And second, no person will be released if there are any pending test results. This modification is effective immediately.

Sincerely,

  
Robert R. Redfield, MD  
Director, CDC