

Can You Make Employees Who Had COVID-19 Test Negative to Return to Work?



Having COVID-19 symptoms is enough to send employees home for the day but not for 14 days

Question

An employee in self-isolation for 14 days since symptoms began and who has been symptom-free for 48 hours wants to return to work. Can we require her to test negative for COVID-19 before letting her come back, just to be sure?

Answer

No.

Explanation

Your authority as an employer goes only so far as the current public health guidelines allow. And under current guidelines, employees that go into self-isolation when symptoms begin are allowed to return to work after 14 days, provided that they've had no symptoms for the last 48 hours. Although you can always recommend that the employee get tested, the guidelines don't require confirmatory testing. The reason for that is the risk of a false positive that can occur when a person who had COVID-19 hasn't totally shed the dead virus.

Keep in mind that undergoing COVID testing is typically not just inconvenient but also uncomfortable since the most common form of testing, RT-PCR, is done on throat samples extracted with a big swab through the patient's nose. So, testing is only justifiable when it's required by the current guidelines. And right now, the guidelines don't require confirmatory testing.