

# CONTACT TRACING

## Definition:

The process used by trained healthcare professionals of identifying and monitoring people who have been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. In Lancaster County, contact tracing is performed by Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health, Lancaster Health Center, WellSpan Health, and the PA Department of Health.



## Process

- Interview patients with COVID-19 to identify their close contacts within two days of showing symptoms.  
*("Close contact" is defined as within 6 feet, for at least 10 minutes, while not wearing a mask)*
- Notify contacts about their possible exposure and ensure they do not interact with others.
- Monitor cases and contacts for symptoms and connect with care if needed.
- Provide social services to support patients' needs in isolation/quarantine.
- Protect patient privacy.  
*(Contacts are only informed that they may have been exposed to a patient with the infection. They are not told the identity of the patient who may have exposed them.)*

## Employer's Role in Contact Tracing if Worker Tests Positive

- Worker should inform employer of COVID-19 status; healthcare staff will not inform employer (no legal authority to do so) unless the PA Department of Health is involved.
- Interview worker to identify close contacts in the workplace—other employees or customers.
- Notify workplace contacts of possible exposure, but do not disclose name of infected worker.
- Follow infection control guidelines to clean areas and equipment in contact with the infected worker.
- Prepare by maintaining contact logs for workers.  
*(<https://covidsafe.cs.washington.edu/> offers an app, or manual logs can be maintained)*

Contact tracing is part of the process of supporting patients who have tested positive for COVID-19 and warning contacts of possible exposure in order to stop chains of transmission. Case investigation is carried out by trained health professionals adhering to strict rules of confidentiality.



**Certain core principles of case investigation and contact tracing must always be adhered to.**

- Case investigation is part of the process of supporting patients with suspected or confirmed infection.
- In case investigation, healthcare staff work with a patient to help them recall everyone with whom they have had close contact during the time frame while they may have been infectious.
- Staff then begin contact tracing by warning these exposed individuals (contacts) of their potential exposure as rapidly and sensitively as possible.
- To protect patient privacy, contacts are only informed that they may have been exposed to a patient with the infection. They are not told the identity of the patient who may have exposed them.
- Contacts are provided with education, information, and support to understand their risk, what they should do to separate themselves from others who are not exposed, monitor themselves for illness, and the possibility that they could spread the infection to others even if they themselves do not feel ill.
- Contacts are encouraged to stay home and maintain social distance from others (at least 6 feet) until 14 days after their last exposure, in case they also become ill. They should monitor themselves by checking their temperature twice daily and watching for cough or shortness of breath. To the extent possible, healthcare staff will check in with contacts to make sure they are self-monitoring and have not developed symptoms. Contacts who develop symptoms should promptly isolate themselves and notify healthcare staff. They should be promptly evaluated for infection and for the need for medical care.

**Case investigation and contact tracing is a specialized skill.**

To be done effectively, it requires people with the training, supervision, and access to social and medical support for patients and contacts. Requisite knowledge and skills for case investigators and contact tracers include, but are not limited to:

- An understanding of patient confidentiality, including the ability to conduct interviews without violating confidentiality (e.g., to those who might overhear their conversations).
- Understanding of the medical terms and principles of exposure, infection, infectious period, potentially infectious interactions, symptoms of disease, pre-symptomatic and asymptomatic infection.
- Excellent and sensitive interpersonal, cultural sensitivity, and interviewing skills such that they can build and maintain trust with patients and contacts.
- Basic skills of crisis counseling, and the ability to confidently refer patients and contacts for further care if needed.
- Resourcefulness in locating patients and contacts who may be difficult to reach or reluctant to engage in conversation.
- Understanding of when to refer individuals or situations to medical, social, or supervisory resources.
- Cultural competency appropriate to the local community.