

Overview of case investigation and contact tracing



11/17/2020

The goal of case investigation and contact tracing is to prevent further transmission of COVID-19 by separating people who have (or may have) COVID-19 from people who do not. Case investigation and contact tracing begins after the health department receives the name of a person who tested positive for COVID-19.

Basics of case investigation

Case investigation is when public health workers gather more information from a person with COVID-19 (a case).

The purpose of case investigation is to:

- Identify any person who was within 6 feet of an infected for 15 minutes or more throughout the course of a day (a contact). However, even shorter periods of time or longer distances can result in spread of the virus.
- Implement isolation for positive cases to prevent further disease spread.
- Collect data on cases and contacts to help inform if preventive strategies are effective.

Information discussed with cases include:

- Data privacy and the right of patients to refuse any questions asked.
- Basic demographic questions.
- Where the patient may have acquired their infection (e.g., workplaces, social events).
- Ability to access basic needs (food, medication) during isolation.

Basics of contact tracing

Contact tracing is the identification and support of people who have been exposed to, and possibly infected with, COVID-19. Asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic people can spread COVID-19; identifying contacts and asking them to self-quarantine helps prevent further transmission of the disease.

The purpose of contact tracing is to:

- Notify contacts of their exposure so they can take preventive steps (self-quarantine).
- Help support quarantine of contacts.
- Recommend next steps if symptoms of COVID-19 appear or if they test positive for COVID-19.

Information discussed with contacts include:

- Data privacy and the right of contacts to refuse any questions asked.
- Notification that contacts may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and need to stay home for 14 days from the time they were last close to the person who tested positive.
- Getting tested even if the person does not have symptoms.
- Symptoms to watch for and what to do if they start to feel sick.

The provider's role

- Follow MDH testing recommendations and reporting requirements for COVID-19. See [Health Care: COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/index.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/index.html).
- Tell patients getting tested that they may get a call from public health workers if their test is positive. It is important to answer the call and talk to them. Patients can get more information on [Tracing COVID-19 \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/tracing.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/tracing.html).
- Remind patients to follow public health recommendations for how long to stay home if they have COVID-19 or are a contact. These recommendations are important for stopping the spread of disease.

Recommendations for contacts

- Stay home for 14 days after your last exposure.
- Watch for symptoms.
- Get tested even if you do not have symptoms. Note that even with a negative test result, the person needs to stay home for 14 days.
- Wash your hands often.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces.

Recommendations for cases

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, stay home until all three of these things are true:

- You feel better. Your cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms are better.
- It has been 10 days since you first felt sick.
- You have had no fever for at least 24 hours, without using medicine that lowers fevers.

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 but still tested positive, you will need to stay home and away from others for at least 10 days from the testing date. You will be contacted by a public health worker who will give you more information.



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