

CASE INVESTIGATION & CONTACT TRACING

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) empowers the public to make informed decisions about their health and the health of their families through its many programs and outreach efforts. An important part of the health department's work during the COVID-19 pandemic focuses on the ability to identify and reduce the impacts of COVID-19 outbreaks, educate and serve the people of Minnesota, and protect the most vulnerable among us. Case investigation and contact tracing is one way to further this mission.

Critical work that helps Minnesotans lower risk

Case investigation and contact tracing is about finding people who may be infectious or contagious with COVID-19 – and may or may not know it – and telling them to stay home and away from others, so they do not infect anyone else.

Investigation and tracing:

- Puts information about COVID-19 into the hands of people in Minnesota who need it most and gives them ways to get critical support.
- Helps limit the spread of disease in general, and helps protect those in high-risk settings and those who are most vulnerable to getting very sick from COVID-19.
- Provides valuable real-time information on risk factors and the spread of COVID-19 that helps inform public health strategies.

Slowing the spread, one case at a time

If you test positive for COVID-19, you can expect a COVID-19 case interviewer to call. Case interviewers work for state, local, or tribal public health departments. They call to give you information about COVID-19, answer your questions, and to make sure that you have the support you need to stay home and away from others. They also ask about who had close contact with you, starting a few days before you tested positive. Case interviewers then call your contacts and give them information and resources. They talk with them about getting tested and about the need to stay home. When people who are sick or may be infected stay home, their germs stay home, too.

We make sure people who test positive, or who are exposed to the virus, get information from a trusted source that helps them take charge and decrease the spread of COVID-19 to others.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

Collected from a voluntary survey of Minnesotans who received a call from a case investigator.

"I felt very well cared for and that my health and the health of those around me was the top concern of my interviewer. Very pleasant and respectful. Put my mind at ease."

"Very quick follow up. Glad Minnesota is on top of this."

"Thank you for providing so much information and taking time to be sure all my questions were answered. It was so helpful and I felt so much better after this call!"

Send the experts where they are needed most

When COVID-19 infections break out in long-term care, correctional facilities, or other high-risk settings, special teams of highly trained health department staff work with those who live in the high-risk setting and with the staff to look at the big picture of the infection. Together, they study how the facility operates and think through needed changes. MDH makes sure its guidance is understood and followed, and that methods to contain infections are based on the best science available, tailored to meet the specific needs of the setting.

Empower Minnesotans with the information they need

MDH has launched a comprehensive communications strategy to build awareness around key COVID-19 messages that support contact tracing efforts and help Minnesotans take action to help slow the spread and protect themselves. This has included advertising, educational outreach, news media, multimedia communications and partnerships with diverse community groups.

Support a flexible, local response

Our goal is to reach each newly infected person and all of their close contacts within 24 hours. In order to meet this goal as testing capacity and the number of COVID-19 cases in Minnesota increases, MDH is:

- Focusing expert MDH staff on specialized case investigation teams to support high-risk people and settings, such as health care workers, supervised group living and child care settings, schools, colleges, and workplaces.
- Supporting tribal and local public health departments conducting case investigation and contact tracing, and partnering with colleges and universities statewide to engage student volunteers from health fields to conduct case investigation.
- Contracting with a staffing vendor to allow MDH to quickly ramp staffing up or down.
- Engaging a workforce management firm, to manage scheduling, provide ongoing training and support, and closely monitor performance and quality.

Our flexible staffing and response activities make MDH able to respond effectively to the dynamic nature of COVID-19 and to the changing needs of our communities, without overbuilding or underbuilding our system.

Use technology to deliver better outcomes

Using texting and other technology can increase MDH efficiency and effectiveness at reaching people who test positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts. MDH is working with testing laboratories and health care providers to ensure that the department gets complete contact information for all test results that come back positive.

Ensure work is equitable across populations

We continue to evaluate our work to ensure it is effective across all populations, geographically, ethnically, and culturally. MDH recognizes how important it is for case investigators and contact tracers to reflect our diverse populations. Our goal is to reach people in their preferred language. Currently, MDH has more than 90 multilingual case investigators; among them more than 20 languages are spoken.

The most vulnerable are often the most at risk of getting COVID-19. Not everyone has the resources or the living situation while they are infectious to stay home and away from others. Many face barriers to getting tested. This is why part of our strategy is to provide trusted community-based organizations with the resources they need to work with our communities of color, American Indians, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA communities. As our partners, COVID Community Coordinators are organizations that will connect our diverse communities to testing opportunities, provide needed support at testing places, and connect them to the COVID-19 resources they need.

