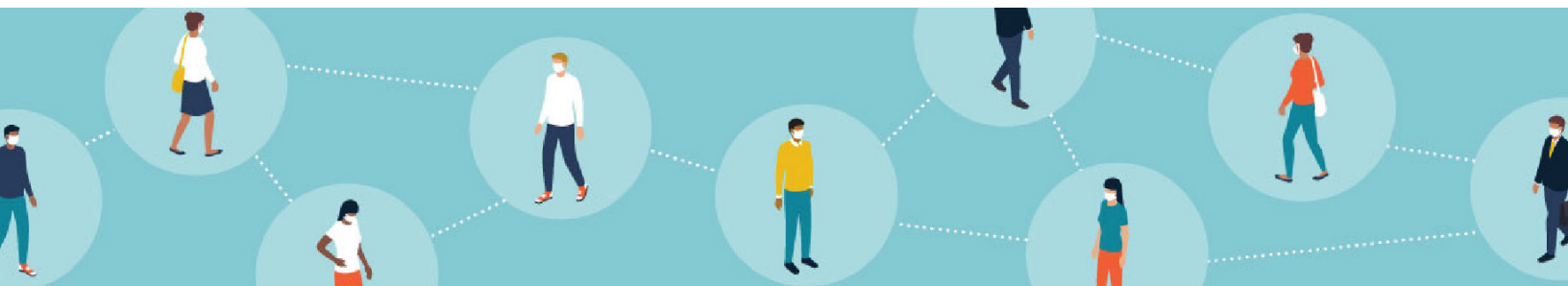# COVID-19 Case Investigation and Contact Tracing
CDC's Role and Approach

Overview

Case investigation and contact tracing are key strategies to stop the spread of COVID-19. Public health departments have used contact tracing for decades to slow or stop the spread of infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis (TB), HIV, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Case investigation and contact tracing can slow the spread of COVID-19 by
- Letting people diagnosed with COVID-19 (cases) know they should isolate to avoid exposing others and assist with notifying their close contacts so they (close contacts) can get tested and quarantine if needed.
- Letting people who might have been exposed to COVID-19 (close contacts) know that they should monitor their health for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, get tested and quarantine if needed.
- Providing resources to people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19 about isolation, quarantine, and vaccination.

Case investigators and contact tracers can facilitate access to COVID-19 vaccination.
Prompt case investigation and contact tracing to slow the spread of COVID-19 should remain the primary goal of the case investigation and contact tracing workforce. However, case investigators and contact tracers can also help people get connected to COVID-19 vaccination services. Case investigators and contact tracers can:

- Emphasize the importance of obtaining a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Explain vaccine eligibility, answer questions, and dispel myths to increase vaccine confidence.
- Provide information on vaccination services or help schedule vaccination appointments. When soliciting information about people who might have been exposed to COVID-19 (close contacts), the case investigators and contact tracers can connect people to vaccination services and resources. This may serve as an additional incentive for people to provide information on their close contacts.
- Assist with connection to vaccination services. Case investigators and contract tracers should have information related to vaccine eligibility, safety, and availability.

CDC's Role in Case Investigation and COVID-19 Contact Tracing

State, tribal, local, and territorial (STLT) health departments lead contact tracing activities in their respective jurisdictions. CDC provides guidance, training, resources, and support for STLT health departments to develop and implement effective contact tracing programs. STLT health departments can use and adapt CDC guidance and resources for COVID-19 contact tracing based on local circumstances. CDC field assignees are stationed in health departments across the nation to directly assist programs in designated public health areas, such as infectious disease.

Case investigation and contact tracing is a specialized skill. Successful case investigation and contact tracing for COVID-19 depends on a well-trained workforce. Case investigators and contact tracers need to have strong interpersonal skills, including being a reflective listener, asking open-ended questions, and being culturally sensitive. These skills are important for building and maintaining trust with people diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19.

Visit CDC's COVID-19 Contact Tracing Training and Resources webpage to learn more about CDC sponsored trainings including the knowledge-based course Making Contact, A Training for COVID-19 Contact Tracers and the skills-based COVID-19 Case Investigation and COVID-19 Contact Tracing Training opportunities.

Important Considerations for Case Investigation and Contact Tracing

Key considerations for developing STLT case investigation and contact tracing programs include:

- **Maintain staffing resources.** STLT health departments should recruit, hire, and maintain a well-trained case investigation and contact tracing workforce.

- **Assist people with COVID-19.** Case investigators should advise people with COVID-19 to isolate immediately. Case investigators must also ask people with COVID-19 who they were around recently (close contacts). Case investigators may need to provide referral to support services and resources to help people with or exposed to COVID-19 to successfully isolate or quarantine, when indicated.

- **Notify people exposed to COVID-19.** Contact tracers should notify people who might have been exposed to COVID-19, advise them to stay home and away from others (quarantine) for 14 days following their last contact to a person with COVID-19 (see exceptions below), and instruct them to monitor their health for symptoms of COVID-19. Contact tracers may need to identify support services for people exposed to COVID-19 to effectively quarantine. People who have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 should receive testing and should quarantine. Exceptions include:

  - Fully vaccinated people who are asymptomatic.
  - People who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered.

  Any close contacts who have symptoms or test positive for SARS-CoV-2 should begin isolation regardless of vaccination status or prior infection.

- **Encourage people with COVID-19 to notify their close contacts.** Encourage people with COVID-19 to tell everyone they were around (close contacts) that they might have been exposed. For COVID-19, a close contact is anyone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. By telling their close contacts that they might have been exposed to COVID-19, their close contacts can monitor their health for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, get tested, and quarantine if needed. Close contacts who have symptoms or test positive for SARS-CoV-2 should begin isolation regardless of vaccination status or prior infection.

- **Contact tracers should be familiar with their local health department's options to reduce quarantine**. They should also have information available for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 3 months and recovered and those who have been fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

- **Use source investigation.** Source investigation is another valuable approach to contact tracing. Source investigation involves looking back over the 14 days before symptoms began or the specimen collection date (for people with no COVID-like symptoms) to identify interactions with people (close contacts), places, and events that may have been where the person with COVID-19 got sick.

- **Evaluate the effectiveness of contact tracing.** Public health officials should be prepared to evaluate the completeness and timeliness of contact tracing activities and use the findings to improve case investigation and contact tracing activities.

- **Use digital tools.** Technology can support case investigation and contact tracing but should not take the place of the staff who interview, counsel, and provide support for those impacted by COVID-19. Digital case management tools may help with the symptom monitoring and management of people with or exposed to COVID-19. Proximity tracing/exposure notification tools may assist traditional contact tracing. CDC does not promote a single tool but provides guidance on digital tools.

- **Educate and engage the community about case investigation and contact tracing.** Open communication about what to expect during case investigation and contact tracing is essential. Informing communities about the steps they should take to protect themselves and others is important to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The success of a contact tracing program depends in large part on a community's participation and acceptance.

- **Connect people to vaccination services**. Case investigators and contact tracers can assist with linkages to vaccination services or help schedule vaccination appointments.

CDC Resources

CDC has guidance documents, training products, implementation tools, and communications resources on COVID-19 case investigation and contact tracing on CDC's Resources for Health Departments webpage. Key resources are also listed below:

Information for Health Departments
- Contact Tracing Resources for Health Departments
- COVID-19 Contact Tracing Training and Resources
- COVID-19 Contact Tracing Communications Toolkit for Health Departments

General Resources for Contact Tracing
- Contact Tracing: Do Your Part To Keep Your Family, Friends, and Community Safe (Infographic)
- When to Quarantine
- Isolate If You Are Sick
- Contact Tracing
- What to Expect with Contact Tracing
- Contact Tracing Frequently Asked Questions and Answers
- Key Steps to Take While Waiting for Your Test Result (Fact sheet)
- Answer the Call – Contact Tracing Video
- How To Talk To Your Close Contacts (Fact sheet)

Vaccine Information
- Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 vaccination
- How CDC is Making COVID-19 Vaccine Recommendations
- Promote Vaccine Confidence
- Communication Resources for COVID-19 Vaccines
- COVID-19 Vaccination Toolkit for Health Departments and other Public Health Partners