

COVID-19



Talking Points on Contract Tracing for Public Health Leadership Speaking to the Media

About Us

Vital Strategies is a global public health organization working in 70+ countries to strengthen public health systems. Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies, aims to prevent at least 100 million deaths from cardiovascular disease and epidemics. Through its Prevent Epidemics program, Resolve to Save Lives has rapidly leveraged existing networks to establish a multi-disciplinary, multi-pronged effort to support countries throughout Africa and beyond. This work is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Gates Philanthropy Partners, which is funded with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

What is contact tracing?

Contact tracing is a confidential process used to find people who may have been exposed to an infectious disease. The goal is to warn them so they can take action to protect themselves and others.

Contact tracing is a well-established public health practice. City and state health departments do contact tracing every day of the year for a wide variety of infectious diseases. Contact tracing has been used for decades and has helped stop outbreaks of tuberculosis, measles, mumps, HIV, meningitis and Ebola. We now need your participation to stop new cases of COVID-19.

How does contact tracing for COVID-19 work?

Contact tracing has six steps that begin when a person is diagnosed with COVID-19:

- Step 1.** If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, the lab or your healthcare provider will notify the health department.
- Step 2.** Health department staff are trained in contact tracing and operate with strict confidentiality. Contact tracers understand that being diagnosed with COVID-19 can be frightening, and their number one responsibility is to help you stay safe and make sure the people that you have been in contact with are safe as well.

In an interview or series of interviews, the contact tracer will help you identify who you have been in close contact with in the recent past when you may have unknowingly transmitted the disease.

During your interview, the health department will also help you draw up a plan for self-isolating. This includes helping you identify a safe space to stay, usually in your home, and helping you identify what steps you need to take to avoid exposing loved ones or others in your life to COVID-19. The health department can help you arrange for delivery of groceries, medications, and other essential items that you'll need during this time.
- Step 3.** The health department will contact anyone you may have exposed to COVID-19. They will notify your contacts of their potential risk of exposure without sharing your name or anything else about your identity.
- Step 4.** The health department will then help the people you were in contact with get tested.
- Step 5.** The health department will help your contacts draw up a plan for self-quarantining in a safe space, usually in their home, avoiding exposing loved ones or others to COVID-19, and arranging supports that may be needed, like delivery of groceries and medicines. Quarantining usually lasts about 14 days, or until we know they have not been infected. By quarantining, we are ensuring that the infection stops with them. This is the only way we will all be able to resume our lives.
- Step 6:** The health department will contact you regularly to monitor how you are doing and to help you determine when you can safely leave home again.

How will privacy be protected during contact tracing?

- None of the information collected will be used or shared in any way outside of contact tracing efforts. For example, the information you provide will not be shared with telemarketers or for future surveys.
- Your data and health status will remain confidential and will not lead to negative repercussions with the government, health insurers, commercial interests or other unintended snoopers.
- In our state/county, contact tracing is a human-to-human process. There are some online

More info at

PreventEpidemics.org
ResolveToSaveLives.org
VitalStrategies.org

resources that can help you, but you will not be tracked through your cell phone or computer.

- The contact tracing program is run by local public health officials—not private tech or phone companies. The program's priority is protecting the health of the community and people's privacy.

Why should people participate?

- Now that we've worked together to flatten the curve, contact tracing is a way to make sure that we never reach the high rates of infection that we saw in other places again.
- Contact tracing is not about tracking people or interrupting people's lives. It is about trying to identify people who have been exposed to a deadly virus, and providing information and support to ensure that they are being tested and cared for and can protect themselves and their loved ones. In doing that, we reduce their role in spreading the disease to others.
- Contact tracing is important to protecting personal health, keeping families and communities healthy and re-opening society.
- Everyone has a role to play in keeping their community safe. This is your opportunity to break the chain of transmission and help us all get past COVID-19.

Recommendations for Keeping Contact Tracing in the News and Increasing Participation

- Provide metrics on contact tracing in your regular press briefings about COVID-19.
- These metrics can include:
 - » The number of people who are participating in contact tracing
 - » The percentage of people who participate when reached
 - » The median time from exposure of a contact to contact notification
 - » Average number of call attempts to a contact
 - » The average number of contacts of those who participate
 - » Number and percentage of people who have who completed isolation and quarantine
 - » Number of staff

If participation numbers are low, reporting the numbers publicly will be a transparent step to motivate people further. Numbers should be accompanied by the message that we need everyone to participate in order to protect each other and move to further reopening.

- Build specific stories of contact tracing into your regular communication with the media about COVID-19. These stories can include:
 - » Success stories of contact tracing using information about specific people who tested positive and their contacts **with their permission**. This can include composite sketches of people without their names or full details with photos or video testimonials. Include someone who was exposed to a few people while pre-symptomatic to illustrate the utility of contact tracing while also de-stigmatizing the patient.
 - » The faces of specific contact tracers and what they have accomplished (i.e., the volume of cases) while on the job. Contact tracing is a human process, and it needs to have an empathetic and trustworthy human face.