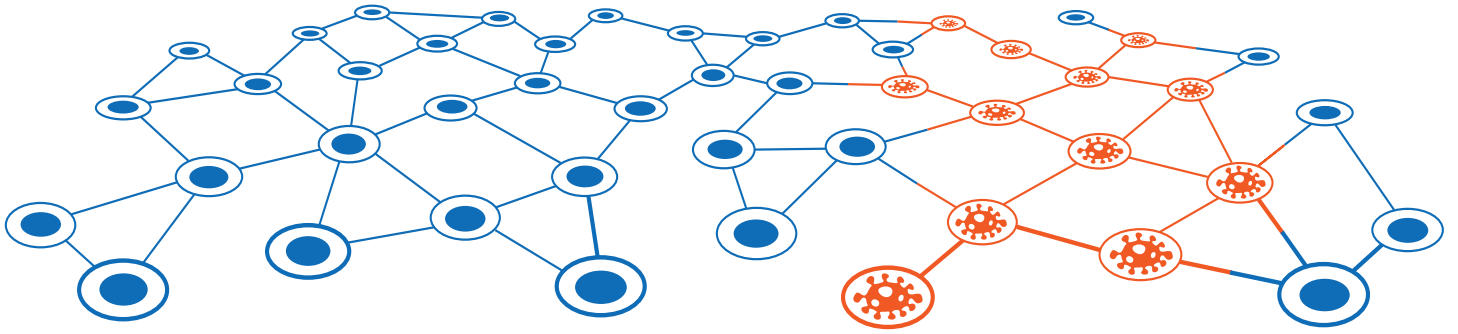


Contact Tracing

Contact tracing is an important tool to track the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.



What it is

- A process used to identify individuals who may have come into meaningful contact with an infected person.
- A method long used in public health to track the spread of many contagious diseases – including measles, HIV, smallpox and now COVID-19.



Contact tracing process

After identifying a positive patient, public health staff will take the following steps:

- 1 Case investigation:** Public health staff work with a patient to help them recall everyone they have had close contact with during the time they may have been infectious.
- 2 Contact tracing:** Public health staff begin contact tracing by notifying exposed people (contacts) of their potential exposure as rapidly and sensitively as possible, not revealing the infected patient's identity.
- 3 Contact support:** Contacts are provided with education, information and support to help them understand their risk, what they should do to separate themselves from others who are not exposed and how to monitor themselves for illness. They also are informed of the possibility they could spread the infection to others even if they do not feel ill.
- 4 Self-quarantine:** Contacts are encouraged to stay home, monitor their health and maintain social distance (at least 6 feet) from others until 14 days after their last exposure to the infected patient, in case they also become ill.



Conclusion

Contact tracing may not be able to eliminate the SARS-CoV-2 virus, but it can help to lessen the spread in communities and strategically protect high-risk populations. For the method to work, however, the population must be willing to supply information to slow the spread.

Learn more on the [CDC website](#).



What it is not

- “Exposure notification” or “digital alerting,” which use consumer apps to alert individuals they may have come in contact with an infected person based on information entered into an app and regardless of the time spent with the individual.



Role of OMSs

OMSs may be contacted during the contact tracing process as a provider or individual. Regardless of the reason for outreach, be sure to consider the following points.

Answer the call

- Make sure you answer the call from contact tracers and provide the requested information. Contact tracing is an important health function and necessary to track and slow the spread of the virus.

Verify the caller

- The caller should be able to provide you information to verify their legitimacy before providing personal information.
- Each state has information on who is performing contact tracing – typically the state or local department of health. If concerned about the legitimacy of a caller, call the referring agency directly and ask to speak with the contact tracer.
- At no time will a contact tracer ask you for Social Security numbers or financial or health insurance information.

HIPAA considerations

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights issued guidance that allows protected health information to be disclosed to public health authorities, such as contact tracers, without specific patient authorization.
- Contact tracers are trained to be HIPAA compliant. They will not share the name of any infected individuals with the people they are contacting – just that they were potentially exposed to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Follow up with patients as necessary

- If an exposure incident occurs in your practice, follow up with patients as necessary and required by law.
- Refer to your state department of health, the [AAOMS Interim Reopening Protocol for the OMS Office](#) and your malpractice provider for guidance.

