

CONTACT TRACING OVERVIEW

Mark Dworkin – UIC SPH Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics

Contact tracing is part of **Public Health Surveillance**, which involves the tracking of diseases of public health importance. When a person with a disease of public health importance is reported to the public health department, there is a legal obligation by certain individuals to respond and investigate each case.

COMMONLY COLLECTED INFORMATION FOR PREVENTING DISEASE SPREAD

RESIDENCE	allows mapping and targeting of neighborhoods for interventions
AGE RACE AND SEX	helps identify target populations
IMMUNIZATION HISTORY	helps determine vaccine effectiveness
CLOSE CONTACTS	helps identify who may need medication, immunization or other protective measures to be offered to those persons

Close Contacts for COVID-19 cases:

A “**close contact**” is defined based on distance from confirmed case and time spent within that distance. For COVID-19 cases, a “close contact” is an individual within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes starting from 2 days before illness onset (or for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

CDC PRINCIPLES OF CONTACT TRACING

RECOLLECTION	Public health workers help a case recall everyone with whom they have close contact during the timeframe they may have been infectious.
WARNING	Public health workers must warn contacts they have been exposed rapidly but sensitively.
CONFIDENTIALITY	Public health workers must assure that the identity of the case is not revealed.
EDUCATION	Public health workers provide contacts with education, information and support in understanding their risk, how to protect others, how to monitor themselves for illness, and the ability to spread infection despite feeling mild or no symptoms.

Applied Principles on COVID-19 cases:

- Contacts are encouraged to stay home and maintain **social distance** from others (at least 6 feet) until 14 days after their last exposure, in case they also become ill.
- Contacts should **monitor** themselves by checking their temperature twice daily and watching for cough or shortness of breath. To the extent possible, public health staff should check in with contacts to make sure they are self-monitoring and have not developed symptoms.
- Contacts who develop symptoms should promptly isolate themselves, notify public health staff (contact tracers) and be promptly evaluated for infection and for the need for medical **treatment**.

FAQ:

How long can someone be asymptomatic?

Someone who is considered asymptomatic experiences no symptoms. If they have not been exposed to someone with virus, they will remain asymptomatic. If they have been exposed to someone with the virus, they will either be asymptomatic until their first symptom occurs which is often a matter of days or, in some people, they do not develop any symptoms at all and just stay asymptomatic even though they were infected.

What is the incubation period?

The period of infection after exposure to someone with the disease and prior to symptoms is considered the incubation period and can last several days.

If you are a contact of someone with COVID-19 and you are asymptomatic, how long can you shed the virus?

There is limited information about shedding but generally it can be said that in most people they are not shedding infectious virus after 10 days. Some people such as those with immune disorders might shed it longer, up to 20 days.