



Contact Tracing Family Medicine Guidance

Contact tracing is a core disease control measure employed by local and state health departments and can be used as a key strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As the U.S. looks to reopen and manage the COVID-19 pandemic, the AAFP is working alongside family physicians to define their role in containing future outbreaks.

This guidance outlines contact tracing basics and how it will impact family medicine practices.

Principles Behind Contact Tracing

- Contact tracing is part of the process of supporting patients with suspected or confirmed infection. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- Contact tracers need effective training to ensure their safety, patient privacy, and the use of appropriate terms. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- [According to the CDC](#), case investigation, contact tracing, and contact follow-up and monitoring will need to be linked with timely testing, clinical services, and agile data management systems to facilitate real-time electronic transmission of laboratory and case data for public health action.
- In contact tracing, local and state public health departments will work with a patient to help them recall everyone with whom they have had close contact during the timeframe they may have been infectious. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- Public health staff then notify exposed contacts of their potential exposure as rapidly and sensitively as possible. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- During the process, patient privacy is protected. The contacts are only informed they may have been exposed to a patient with the infection and are not told the identity of the patient who may have exposed them. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- Contacts are provided with education and support to understand their risk. Contacts will receive information on what they should do to separate themselves from others who are exposed, monitor themselves for illness, and the possibility they could spread the infections to others even if they do not feel ill. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- Contacts are strongly encouraged to stay home and maintain social distancing. Per the [Centers for Disease and Control Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the following social distancing actions should be followed:
 - Contacts should social distance from others at least 6 feet.

- Contacts should stay in isolation until 14 days after their exposure, in case they become ill.
- Contacts who have been infected may display symptoms ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. These symptoms are often, but not always, found in COVID-19 infections. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fever
 - Chills
 - Muscle pain
 - Sore throat
 - Loss of taste or smell

This list is not all possible symptoms. Less common symptoms have been reported, including gastrointestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea).

- When possible, public health department staff may check in with contacts to make sure they are self-monitoring and have not developed symptoms. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- Contacts who develop symptoms should promptly isolate themselves and notify public health staff. Public health staff should promptly evaluate for infection and the need for medical care. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)
- Public education about contact tracing is important to ensure the effectiveness of the program. *Reference:* [CDC Contact Tracing](#)

Role of Family Medicine Practices

- Understand the roles of local and/or state public health departments and how they will conduct contact tracing, because these duties will often vary across different locations.
 - [NACCHO Directory of Local Health Departments](#)
 - [State Health Departments](#)
- Develop protocols on how the practice will connect with local and/or state public health departments (e.g. patient information required by public health department, patients referred to health department, etc.). View helpful CDC resources at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/reporting-pui.html>.
- When suspected or confirmed infected patients are identified, contact the local and/or state public health department.
- Provide medical guidance to describe the wide range of symptoms the suspected or confirmed infected patients may or not display.

- Provide preventive guidance to the suspected or confirmed infected patients to explain the risk of spreading COVID-19 among family, friends, etc.
- When possible, provide suspected or confirmed infected patients with education information about contact tracing and what's involved.
- Stay connected with suspected or confirmed infected patients to answer questions and evaluate medical conditions.

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Family Medicine Contact Tracing Guidance Algorithm

