



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19): Contact Tracing

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Contact tracing is the process of identifying people who may have come into contact with an individual with an infectious disease. The process involves identifying infected people, determining who they have been in close contact with while infected and asking people who are potentially infected to stay home until it is clear they are not sick.

For the coronavirus 2019 pandemic, contact tracing begins with a phone interview of the positive COVID-19 patient, obtaining details regarding the patient's contacts, who they have interacted with and where they have gone recently. The next step involves reaching out to people with whom the infected person has interacted during a two-week period.

Why is contact tracing necessary?

Contact tracing is an essential tool used to decrease the spread of infectious disease and has been effectively employed during other health emergencies. Effective use of contact tracing is a critical step in decreasing the number of COVID-19 cases.

Who conducts contact tracing?

Maryland has finalized a contract to conduct statewide contact tracing for COVID-19 with NORC at the University of Chicago, one of the largest independent social research organizations in the United States. Contact tracing programs will be facilitated by NORC in coordination with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and local health departments throughout the state.

Does contact tracing damage my privacy and violate HIPAA laws?

No. Contact tracers take extreme measures to protect the privacy of infected patients and maintain strict adherence to HIPAA regulations. During a trace investigation, a person will be notified that they may have come into contact with an infected individual, but the infected person's name is not disclosed and minimal information is conveyed.

What kinds of questions might I be asked by a contact tracer?

If you are called by a contact tracer, they will ask about your health, any potential symptoms you may have, and the duration of those symptoms. They may ask about your whereabouts for a specific period of time. If you had close contact with others during that time, they will ask for names and contact information for those individuals.

What kind of questions will a contact tracer never ask?

A contact investigator will never ask you for your social security number, financial or bank account information, or personal details unrelated to COVID-19. They will not ask for photographs or videos of any kind. They will not ask for your passwords. They will not ask for money or payment.

For more information about COVID-19 in Maryland, visit coronavirus.maryland.gov.