

## How COVID-19 tracing works

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1. Doctors, nurses, hospitals, and labs report the names of people who test positive for COVID-19 to the health department, the same way they report other infectious diseases. They also give the test results to the person who tested positive, and tell them what to do next.
2. People who test positive for COVID-19 will be contacted to answer questions about their symptoms, how they may have gotten COVID-19, as well as who they may have spread it to.
  - Most people will receive a phone call from a trained health worker. If you gave a cell phone number at the time of testing, you will get a text message with instructions to answer contact tracing questions online. If you prefer a phone call, you do not need to reply to the text and a health worker will call you.
  - Public health workers help people with COVID-19 find information online and answer their questions. People with COVID-19 are told to stay home, and in one room away from others as much as possible. They are told to do this for at least 10 days, starting the day their symptoms first started and until at least 24 hours after they no longer have a fever, without using medicine that lowers fevers.
  - They are asked about people who spent time close to them, starting two days before they were tested or from when they first started feeling sick. It is possible that some of these people are now infected.
3. A trained health worker then contacts the people who spent time close to the person with COVID-19.
  - People who live with someone who tested positive and any other close contacts are told they may have been exposed and should stay home for 14 days, counting from their last close contact with the person who tested positive. They are told to watch for symptoms, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
  - People with COVID-19 can infect others, even if they do not have symptoms. It is important that those who were close to the person with COVID-19 stay home and away from others.

## What is a "close contact"

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Trained public health workers help decide who is a "close contact" of someone with COVID-19.

- People who test positive for COVID-19 will be asked about the people with whom they spent time, starting two days before they were tested or from when they first started feeling sick.
- Being close generally means being less than 6 feet from someone with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more throughout a 24-hour period. However, even shorter periods of time or longer distances can result in spread of the virus.
- The chance of spreading the virus is greater the longer an infected person is close to someone and the closer they are to each other. It also matters if the infected person is coughing, sneezing, singing, shouting, or doing anything else that can put more virus into the air.

### Special circumstances

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Special teams from the health department get involved if a close contact is a health care worker. This includes someone who works in a nursing home or other settings where a lot of people live in the same place, such as jails, homeless shelters, or treatment centers. This is because health care workers spend a lot of time close to people who have COVID-19 or who are at high risk of getting it.

### Privacy

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Protecting the health privacy of people is critical to public health. It is also state law. People who test positive for COVID-19 get a detailed privacy notice when the health department contacts them. The notice tells them what information the health department is asking for and how it will be used. People have the right to refuse giving any or all information. Information given to the health department is shared with local public health officials and other public health staff working on the COVID-19 response.

To protect the health and safety of others, MDH may sometimes need to share your name and that you tested positive for COVID-19 with your school, child care, or workplace if you work in a health care setting. MDH will try to reach you by phone first to explain why your name may need to be shared.

Addresses, but not names of people who test positive for COVID-19 are shared with 911 dispatch centers, if the people agree to share their address with the health department after getting the privacy notice. Addresses are shared under a governor's executive order. If emergency responders are called to those addresses, they know ahead of time to take health safety steps against COVID-19 infection. Law enforcement is not allowed to use these addresses for any investigations, and address information is removed from dispatch records when the person is no longer able to infect others.

### Answer the call

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It is important to answer telephone calls or text messages from public health workers doing contact tracing. Contact tracing works to slow the spread of COVID-19 only if those who test positive for it, and their close contacts, answer calls or texts and follow instructions to stay home and away from others.

Trained workers who call can answer your questions, and tell you about services and how to protect your family, friends, and community. Trained workers leave messages if they cannot reach you. Please return their calls as soon as you can.

### Avoiding scams

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Do not let concerns about calls from possible scammers keep you from talking with the health department. Here is a list of things public health workers may ask you about on a call, and a few things they will NEVER ask.

Public health workers will ask about:

- Symptoms you may be having.
- People you may have been in contact with.
- If you have been tested for COVID-19, including dates and locations.

We will NEVER ask for:

- Your Social Security number, bank account information, or credit card numbers.

When in doubt, hang up and contact us. The Minnesota Helpline can help answer any questions you might have about a possible COVID-19 scam or a call claiming to come from MDH. Call 651-297-1304 or 1-800-657-3504.

Download the free COVIDaware MN app to get notified if you have been near someone who tests positive for COVID-19.