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COVID-19 Contact Tracing

Contact tracing has been used for decades to slow or stop the spread of infectious diseases. This process helps to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19 by identifying people who have come into close contact with someone with COVID-19 and asking them to take certain steps.

A close contact is someone who has been near a person with COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes when health and safety measures (e.g., face masks, distancing, ventilation, etc.) were not in place or were insufficient. A person is a close contact at least two days prior to onset of symptoms and typically includes people you live with, people who you share a room for extended periods, and people who you've had intimate contact, such as your partner.

Contact tracing helps diagnose people who may have COVID-19 sooner and isolates that person prior to the onset of symptoms to prevent the virus from spreading. The people they have spent time with during their infectious period may be considered "close contacts" and should be notified. The following steps are followed when contact tracing:

1. If you have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19, a public health worker will call you to inform you that you may have been exposed to COVID-19.
2. Help people with COVID-19 recall everyone they had close contact with during the time when they might have been able to spread COVID-19 to other people. Your name will not be shared with those you came in contact with, even if they ask. Any information you share will be considered confidential.
3. Ask people with COVID-19 to notify everyone they were in close contact with to tell them that they have been exposed to COVID-19.
4. You will also be asked to stay at home and to self-isolate, if you are not doing so already, in accordance with local health authority requirements. The investigator may also provide connections to supportive services for self-isolation.

Some of the questions that a contact tracer will ask you may include the following:

- Your demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.)
- Your location and contact information, such as where you have lived for the past month, who else lives with you, how many people stay or visit you, contact info, etc.
- Your work information, such as name, title, location, number of workers, close contacts, work hours, work history over the past 14 days, etc.
- Your vaccination status (e.g., Moderna/Pfizer/AstraZeneca), timeline for each dose, as applicable
- If you've had COVID-19 before, when, and a description of your past and ongoing symptoms
- A description of your current symptoms and if you've sought out health care advice
- Your underlying health conditions and other risk factors such as cancer, COPD, chronic kidney disease, heart disease, immunocompromised state, severe obesity, pregnancy, smoking, and Type II diabetes

Sources:

Close Contacts and Contact Tracing. British Columbia Centre For Disease Control, Provincial Health Services Authority (2022). <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/self-isolation/close-contacts>.

COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (October 21, 2021). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#Contact-Tracing>.

Contact Tracer's Interview Tool: Notifying People About an Exposure to COVID-19. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (December 29, 2021). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/notification-of-exposure.html>.

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