



TOPICS IN THE NEWS:

Contact Tracing

INTRODUCTION

The concept of contact tracing is a recent focus of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the term may ring unfamiliar to many of us, it has been a standard tactic of public health personnel for decades, employed to stem the spread of infectious diseases such as Ebola, SARS, and certain STDs. Presently, epidemiologists believe that contact tracing is central to reopening businesses and resuming some form of normal life as the coronavirus pandemic begins to subside. So, what exactly is it? In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined the basic components as these:

- **Contact identification:** Once someone is confirmed as infected with a virus, contacts are identified by asking about the person's activities and the activities and roles of the people around them since onset of illness. Contacts can be anyone who has been in contact with an infected person: family members, work colleagues, friends, or health care providers.
- **Contact listing:** All persons considered to have contact with the infected person should be listed as contacts. Efforts should be made to identify every listed contact and to inform them of their contact status, what it means, the actions that will follow, and the importance of receiving early care if they develop symptoms. Contacts should also be provided with information about prevention of the disease. In some cases, quarantine or isolation is required for high risk contacts, either at home, or in hospital.
- **Contact follow-up:** Regular follow-up should be conducted with all contacts to monitor for symptoms and test for signs of infection.

Lately much more has been written about contact tracing and the role it could serve in allowing a return to some semblance of normalcy. See the selections listed below for a crash course in the practice.

GENERAL REPORTS

- [*What Is Contact Tracing? Here's How It Could Be Used to Help Fight Coronavirus*](#) (*Time*, April 22, 2020)
- [*Contact Tracing: Get and Keep America Open: Supporting states, tribes, localities, and territories*](#)
A compilation of resources from the Center for Disease Control (CDC)
- [*Reopening Means Contact Tracing. Many States Aren't Ready.*](#) (*Stateline*, an initiative of The Pew Charitable Trusts, April 29, 2020)
- [*A national plan to enable comprehensive COVID-19 case finding and contact tracing in the US*](#) (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2020)
- [*A coordinated, national approach to scaling public health capacity for contact tracing and disease investigation*](#) (Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, 2020)

TRAINING RESOURCES

To employ contact tracing to the degree public health experts describe as necessary would very much be a “boots on the ground” endeavor, requiring a vast pool of tracers. Volunteers would need to be recruited from the general public as well as redeployment of medical professionals. With that in mind, public health organizations have developed training resources, such as those listed below.

- [Making Contact: A Training for COVID-19 Contact Tracers](#)
This introductory online course for entry-level COVID-19 contact tracers, can be used by health agencies in rapid training of new contact tracers.
- [COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING TRAINING GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES](#) (*CDC Website*)
A sample training plan including training topics that may be helpful for state and local public health jurisdictions to consider when designing their own training plan for COVID-19 contact tracers

PRIVACY CONCERNS

With COVID-19 being a 21st Century pandemic, the ability to trace this disease through electronic surveillance could be viewed as a tempting and convenient solution. But at what point does this convenience come at too great a cost to personal privacy? The following papers offer some recent considerations of this concern.

- [CONTAIN: Privacy-oriented Contact Tracing Protocols for Epidemics](#) (Cornell University Library, working paper, April 10, 2020)
- [Contact Tracing Mobile Apps for COVID-19: Privacy Considerations and Related Trade-offs](#) Cornell University Library, working paper, March 30, 2020)
- [COVID-19 Contact Tracing and Data Protection Can Go Together](#) (JMIR Mhealth Uhealth. April 20, 2020)

CAVEAT:

It is hard to assess the reliability of the links provided in this report, given the current telework conditions. Please email librarian@michigan.gov for copies of the materials referenced here if access is restricted.