

COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING

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The Laborers' Health & Safety Fund of North America (LHSFNA) recognizes that LIUNA and its signatory employers are committed to ensuring the safety and health of their workforce, including taking the appropriate steps to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus (SARs-CoV-2) and the disease it causes, COVID-19. An integral part of that process includes working with local health departments/agencies to assist with and cooperate during contact tracing.

What Is Contact Tracing?

Typically performed by public health agencies, contact tracing is a process used to identify, educate and monitor people who have had close contact with an infected person. These people are at increased risk for infection and spreading the virus to others. Contact tracing helps exposed individuals understand their risk and limit further spread of the virus.

During contact tracing, patients recall everyone they had close contact with while they may have been infectious. Public health staff then warn these exposed contacts of their potential exposure as rapidly and sensitively as possible.

Contacts are provided with information about their risk, how to separate themselves from others who are not exposed, how to monitor themselves for illness and actions to take if they experience symptoms. They are also provided with community resources during periods of quarantine or self-isolation.

Contact Tracing Applied to the Workplace

While contact tracing is primarily the responsibility of public health agencies, with the rapidly changing circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers can play a valuable role in this process.

If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the local public health agency may ask employers to provide employee rosters, attendance records and contact information for employees who may have been exposed. To assist in contact tracing efforts, employers can follow these recommended best practices:

- Maintain attendance records, including employees' scheduled shifts.
- For indoor office environments, maintain records of a floor plan or seating chart.
- For construction jobsites, keep track of all workers, vendors, subcontractors and visitors who enter the site. Keep track of employees assigned to specific work areas, groups of workers who work together on a specific task or are otherwise working in close contact (within six feet) for a prolonged period of time (15 cumulative minutes over a 24 hour period).

In addition to these best practices, employers can support contact tracing efforts by public health agencies by implementing some steps of the contact tracing process in the workplace. Many of these steps may be extensions of an existing worker screening and assessment program. For more information, please refer to the Fund's *COVID-19 Screenings and Assessments*.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Contact tracers collect important data that helps track COVID-19 cases and monitors risk in the workplace. All data collected during this process is confidential. Interviews should be conducted in a private area. Confidential information should be kept in a secure area and transmitted through secure methods.

Step 1: Designate a Team

The employer should designate an employee or group of employees as the contact tracing team for the organization. This team should work closely with staff at applicable public health agencies through the contact tracing process. This team should also consult with the organization's legal team and HR department, if applicable. To become familiar with the contact tracing process, consider completing a contact tracing training. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) offers a free, introductory self-paced online course, *Making Contact: A Training for COVID-19 Contact Tracers*.

This team should also be familiar with other LHSFNA COVID-19 materials, resources and regulations released by the CDC or Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) as well as guidance released by federal, state and local agencies, provinces and territories.

- A list of U.S. state and territorial health department websites [can be found here](#).
- A list of Canadian provincial and territorial resources for COVID-19 [can be found here](#).

Step 2: Identify and Interview

Contact tracing should be initiated after identifying a symptomatic person in the workplace, after being notified an employee has a suspected case of COVID-19 according to their healthcare provider or after an employee tests positive for COVID-19. In the first scenario, contact tracing should be initiated as soon as possible after a symptomatic person is identified; ideally this occurs before they leave the workplace. In the second and third scenarios, contact tracing should be initiated as soon as possible after receiving notification that the person has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

WHO IS A CLOSE CONTACT?

Someone who was within six feet of an infected person for a prolonged period of time (15 cumulative minutes over a 24 hour period).

The contact tracing team should reference the employee's schedule and work area to help determine who the employee came in contact with.

The interview should be conducted in an isolated, confidential area of the workplace separate from other employees. Interviews should start with a discussion about confidentiality and the purpose of the interview. The interviewer should then ask the employee to provide the name of all employees, visitors or vendors they had close contact with starting from 48 hours before symptoms appeared through the time of the interview. For example, if an employee started experiencing COVID-19 symptoms on a Wednesday, and they worked on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, they would provide the names of everyone they come in contact with at the workplace starting on Monday.

At the end of the interview, a symptomatic person should be advised to self-isolate at home, contact their healthcare provider and follow instructions from their healthcare provider and state, provincial, territorial or local health department. A person with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 should be reminded to follow the instructions provided by their healthcare provider and/or health department.

Information can be provided verbally, electronically or in written form. If provided in person, the interviewer should wear appropriate PPE to protect themselves and maintain a distance of at least six feet from the symptomatic employee. Appropriate PPE includes a gown, a pair of disposable gloves, eye protection (goggles or disposable face shield that fully covers the front and sides of the face), respiratory protection such as a NIOSH-approved N95 or higher-level respirator or a facemask (if a respirator is not available).

Step 3: Notify Employees Who May Have Been Exposed

If an employee is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 via testing or through their healthcare provider, the contact tracing team should contact the employees identified in Step 2 and share the following information:

- Inform them they have been identified as having contact with a person in the workplace who suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. To maintain confidentiality, do not provide them with the name of the employee.
- Provide the employee with guidelines for self-quarantine.
- Inform the employee to contact their healthcare provider if they experience COVID-19 symptoms: fever (temperature of 100.4°F or greater) or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea.
- Allow time for the employee to ask questions.

GUIDELINES FOR SELF-QUARANTINE

Who is it for?

- Employees with recent close contact with a person who is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19

What should they do?

- Stay home for 14 days, starting from the date of last exposure
- Practice social distancing
- Check their temperature twice a day
- Self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms
- Contact their healthcare provider if symptoms develop

Communication Tips for Successful Interviews

Conducting interviews and notifying employees of potential exposure is a high-stress situation and may be difficult. Use the tips below to help navigate these potentially challenging situations.

- **Keep mental state in mind:** The person being interviewed or notified is likely to be upset; they may be scared, too sick to talk or may have lost a loved one to the virus. People may be angry at the person they think exposed them to the virus. That person's name is confidential. Assure them their information will be kept confidential as well.
- **Be confident and build trust:** Communicate with empathy (“I understand this isn’t easy.”) and maintain professional boundaries with the person being interviewed. Be polite and non-judgmental. Help address the employee's concerns.
- **Stick to the facts:** Provide clear information and correct any misconceptions about COVID-19. Avoid using unnecessary technical terms, jargon or acronyms. Interviewers should resist the urge to answer a question unless they are sure of the answer; instead, find out and get back to the employee.

Resources

Please contact the LHSFNA at 202-628-5465 for specific questions or concerns not addressed above. The LHSFNA can develop contact tracing guidance and assistance tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of your workplace.

CDC

[Contact Tracing: Part of a Multipronged Approach to Fight the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

PHAC

[Public health management of cases and contacts associated with coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)