August 31, 2020
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Importance of Case Investigation and Contact Tracing

Sterling, Colo. – August 31, 2020: Throughout history there have been numerous pandemics. The influenza pandemic of 1918 was the most severe, worldwide pandemic in recent history. In the United States, it was first identified in military personnel in the spring of 1918 and mortality was high. With no vaccine to protect against influenza infection and no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections that can be associated with influenza infections, control efforts worldwide were limited to non-pharmaceutical interventions such as isolation, quarantine, good personal hygiene, use of disinfectants, wearing face coverings and limitations of public gatherings. Even at that time in history these interventions were applied unevenly. It is important to remember that most of the interventions being used for COVID-19 are not new.

Case investigation and contact tracing is another important intervention that has been used for decades by state and local health departments to interrupt the spread of infectious diseases (i.e., syphillus, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis) and prevent outbreaks. The goal of contact tracing is to stop or limit the transmission

by finding everyone an infected person has been in contact with, quarantining them and possibly testing them, especially if they have symptoms. This process allows people that may have been exposed to know about the potential exposure and provide guidance so they can monitor their health for signs and symptoms. It also ensures people who may have been exposed know how they can get tested.

If you are waiting for a COVID-19 test result, you will be asked to stay home and monitor your health to protect your friends, family and others from possibly getting COVID-19. While you wait for your test result, think about everyone you have been in close contact with recently. This will be important information to have available if your test result is positive. If you have tested positive for COVID-19 you can expect an employee from the Northeast Colorado Health Department (NCHD) to call you to check on your health and discuss who you have been around. You will also be asked to continue to stay at home, away from others, and monitor your health. You can be around others after 24 hours with no fever without using any fever-reducing medications **and** respiratory symptoms have improved **and** 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

If your test result is negative and you do not have symptoms, it is important to continue staying away from others (self-quarantine) for 14 days after your last exposure to someone who may have had COVID-19. A negative result before the end of your quarantine period does not rule out possible infection. You should not need to repeat the test unless you develop symptoms or if you require a test to return to work.

If someone from NCHD does call, speaking with our staff is the best way for you to help us all slow the spread of COVID-19 in your community. Discussions

with health department staff are confidential and your personal and medical information will be kept private. Your name will not be shared with those you came in contact with. The health department will only notify people you have been in close contact with to make them aware they may have been exposed to COVID-19. For COVID-19, a close contact is anyone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for more than 15 minutes. An infected person can spread COVID-19 starting 48 hours (or 2 days) before the person had any symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19. The health department staff will not ask you about immigration status or for any financial information. Anyone asking for personal financial information under the guise of your local health department should be reported by going to www.StopFraudColorado.com or by calling 1-800-222.4444.

New, technology-driven forms of contact tracing developed by Apple and Google brings profound concerns about intrusion and fear that it can be used for many other things down the road. NCHD does not use any apps for contact tracing, but rather our staff contact by phone only and will uphold strict confidentiality. You will not be required to download an app to give information for contact tracing for COVID-19.

If you have been around someone diagnosed with COVID-19, someone from NCHD may call you and ask you to monitor your health as well as self-quarantine for 14 days. You are considered a close contact even if you were wearing a mask while you were around someone with COVID-19. Masks definitely help prevent spread of the virus, but they are not 100% effective. If you have been around someone who has COVID-19 recently, but you feel fine you should still stay away from others for 14 days from the last day you were around that person

because people with COVID-19 can still spread the virus even if they don't have any symptoms. If you have been exposed, taking these steps will help protect you, your family and your community.

Supporting patients with suspected or confirmed infection through case investigation and warning those exposed individuals through contact tracing are two key tools public health is using to limit and stop the spread of COVID-19. In order to be effective, we need everyone to do their part and cooperatively participate and engage with NCHD staff if we call.

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