



# NEWS RELEASE

Mary Brumage  
Marketing and Media Specialist  
(970) 522-3741 x1257  
maryb@nchd.org

June 9, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **The Importance of Case Investigation and Contact Tracing**

Sterling, Colo. – June 9, 2020: There has been a lot of discussion around COVID-19 case investigation and contact tracing but what is it and why is it so important now that our counties are reopening?

Case investigation and contact tracing is valuable in protecting friends, family, and community members from future disease spread and potential outbreaks. The concept of tracing the origin of a disease is nothing new. In fact, it was a major factor to beating smallpox and polio and has been a core disease control measure to prevent the spread of many infectious diseases throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still utilized today for tuberculosis, H1N1, HIV, Measles, E.coli and sexually transmitted infections, among many others.

*“Engagement with the public during contact tracing is imperative,” says NCHD Response Coordination Officer, Mike Burnett. “Since we are out in the public again and interacting more frequently, this is the best tool we have to manage this disease in a proactive way while allowing our economy to start to thrive.”*

Case investigation and contact tracing is a very lengthy process conducted by a public health workers. It starts with the case investigation of a patient who has tested positive for COVID-19 by quickly locating and talking with them, assisting in arranging isolation plans for themselves and working to identify people with whom they have been in close contact. Close contact means anyone the patient has been within 6 feet from for at least 10 minutes starting 48 hours prior to

illness onset until the time of isolation. Usually this means family, friends, and people who live or work together.

*“As we learn more about this disease, it’s more likely that it is contracted by someone you live with or spend a lot of time together such as a coworker or carpooling,” explained Trish McClain, NCHD Public Health Director. “It’s less likely to be the checkout person or a passer-by on the street, and those aren’t currently investigated as contacts for COVID-19.”*

Those identified as close contacts are notified during the contact tracing process where they are interviewed and given guidance on how to keep themselves and others safe. Interviewers can also help connect people with resources they may need while they stay home for 14 days to ensure they are not sick (quarantine) or to stay home, recovering from being sick (isolation). Interviewers will never ask for, or write down, immigration status, Social Security number, financial information or marital status. They do not reveal who they were exposed to.

Individual information is not shared and all information collected during interviews is used only by public health agencies to track the spread of the disease. Interviewers operate under strict confidentiality rules and collected data is protected in secure systems.

If tested positive for the virus, whether symptomatic or not, it’s very important to talk with public health contact tracers so that we can utilize individual isolation or quarantine appropriately to prevent further spread. When you do, it helps us:

- Understand communities affected by COVID-19.
- Inform public health actions.
- Understand who is at risk.
- Follow up with high risk groups.
- Track the progress of the outbreak in our state.

###