



## Goodhue County *Health and Human Services*

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### **Contact Tracing and COVID-19**

**Goodhue County, August 2020** – During a global pandemic, it is expected to hear many terms or phrases that we are not very familiar with. One of those words that we have been hearing quite a bit lately is contact tracing. Many people have questions about contact tracing, from how it works, to how the data is used.

Contact tracing sounds like a new term but it has been around for many decades. It is an important tool in tracking infectious (contagious) diseases. Contact tracing is a way of finding out who has been in contact with a disease and who may be at risk of getting sick. By finding out who has come in contact with a disease, we can help to reduce the number of additional people who may get sick from that disease. People then have the appropriate information to make decisions on seeing a doctor, getting tested, quarantining themselves and taking necessary precautions to slow the possibility of exposing more people to the disease.

#### **Contact Tracing and COVID-19**

So how does contact tracing work in regards to COVID-19? In contact tracing, public health staff work call and get in touch with positive lab confirmed COVID-19 patients. Staff then work with the patient to help them recall everyone with whom they have had close contact, within 6 feet for more than 15 minutes, during the timeframe while they may have been infectious. If the patient is uncomfortable notifying their close contacts local public health staff will contact the close contacts.

Local public health staff may follow up with employers of positive lab confirmed cases of COVID-19. The Minnesota Department of Health follows up with health care workers and contacts who work in congregate settings, as well as child care providers and sports teams. Patient privacy is very important. When public health staff get in touch with contacts they do not identify who the patient is who may have exposed them, unless that patient provided public health staff permission to provide their name.

Patients are provided with education, information, and support to understand their risk. They are informed of aspects such as what they should do to separate themselves from others who are not exposed, how to monitor themselves for illness, and the possibility that they could spread the infection to others even if they themselves do not feel ill.

During the interview with the positive lab confirmed case, if the case agrees to notify their close contact, we tell them what their contacts should do if they develop symptoms. We ask them to share the information from the link to Minnesota Department of Health fact sheets for cases and contacts. They are referred to the COVID-19 testing hotline where a triage nurse will determine if they should be tested. They are discouraged from entering a medical clinic if have symptoms after an exposure, unless they need emergency or medical care.

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## Asymptomatic

Many people who have COVID-19 are asymptomatic, meaning they might have the virus and not know it, or they might get the virus eventually. While people are feeling healthy they may be actively spreading COVID-19 by walking around and spreading respiratory droplets. These droplets may not have an impact on the carrier yet can cause devastating harm to others. It can take up to two weeks for symptoms to show, and that's how the quarantine period of two weeks was chosen. If you are going to get sick, you are going to get sick in those two weeks. That is why it is important to know you were exposed to COVID-19 so that you can quarantine yourself from others for those 14 days. In Goodhue County, about 15% of our cases have been asymptomatic at the time of testing/case investigation.

## We can work together

We can work together to help slow the spread of COVID-19. If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, someone will call you and ask you to self-quarantine at home for 14 days from the day that you were exposed. Do your part to keep your family and your community safe: answer the call to slow the spread.

## Scams

Beware of scams related to contact tracing. If you may have been exposed to COVID-19, a public health worker will first reach out to you by phone call, not by text. They will never ask for credit card numbers or money. Some scammers impersonate public health workers by sending a text that includes a link to download software – do not click! Also, some scammers have been asking for credit card numbers in order to send a “test kit.” This is a scam, do not reply.

File a complaint or report fraud:

<https://www.aq.state.mn.us/Office/Forms/COVID19Complaint.asp>

## About Goodhue County Health and Human Services:

The mission of Goodhue County Health and Human Services is to “Promote, Protect and Strengthen the Health of Individuals, Families, and Communities.” The department has four service divisions: Economic Assistance, Public Health, Social Services, and HHS Finance/IT. For more information on Goodhue County Health & Human Services, please visit [www.co.goodhue.mn.us](http://www.co.goodhue.mn.us).



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