



# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Louisiana COVID-19 Contact Tracing

Last updated: 5/14/2020. Note these FAQs will be updated as needed.

## What is contact tracing?

**It's a method for keeping a disease from spreading to more people.**

Contact tracing is a decades old practice of many health departments with the goal of preventing the spread of certain diseases. Since some diseases spread easily from person to person, identifying someone who may have been exposed to another person who has tested positive for a disease is an important way of keeping a disease from spreading further. Contact tracing is done for many different diseases to lessen the number of people getting infected.

## How does contact tracing work?

**Contact tracers call people who test positive for the virus to have a conversation about how they're doing, offer information, share health and safety recommendations, and understand how many close contacts this person had while they were contagious.**

One of the most important parts of contact tracing involves talking to someone who tests positive for a disease to ask them who else they have been in contact with while they may have been contagious. Then, the health department **will call those people to see if they may be sick and provide them with important information on what to do if they start to feel sick. This phone call allows the health department to help people get access to testing or support if they need it.** The people that the health department calls will be advised to do a few important things to reduce the chance of getting others sick. This includes asking the person to stay home until a period of time passes and monitor their health. Contact tracing has become a key strategy of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

## What's the difference between isolation and quarantine?

**Isolation** separates **sick people** with a contagious disease from people who are not sick to prevent transmission to others. **Quarantine** separates and limits the movement of **people who were exposed** to a contagious disease to see if they become sick, and prevent transmission to others.

## Who are considered “close contacts”?

Close contacts are people who have been **less than 6 feet away from someone who has COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes**.

One of the ways COVID-19 spreads is through someone having close contact with a person who is infected. Close contacts are not the same as a casual contact, such as a person who might pass by on the street or lives on the same block. Close contacts include people that live in the same house together, intimate partners, and caregivers for someone who has tested positive. Because these people share the same space for long periods of time, it is easy for COVID-19 to pass between them.

## I received a call or message from a contact tracer.

### Why do they want to talk to me?

**The Louisiana Department of Health has a team of contract tracers calling anyone who tested positive for COVID-19 and anyone who might have been in close contact with someone known to have tested positive. If someone you know or have been in close contact with has tested positive, the contact tracing team will call you to see how you are feeling, if you are having any symptoms, offer support for getting tested, and provide information on how to self-quarantine.**

If you are a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and you get a phone call from a contact tracer, it's nothing to be ashamed of. This virus is highly contagious, and anyone can contract it. The most important thing is that we do our best to prevent others from getting sick. If you do test positive for COVID-19, someone from the Louisiana Department of Health will call you to follow up on how you are feeling and ask about anyone who may have been close to you in the days before you realized you were sick.

It is important to have an honest conversation with the person on the other end of the phone. This person will ask you questions about when you began to have symptoms, when you got tested, and who you have been spending time with. They will ask for phone numbers of your close contacts as well.

When the contact tracer calls your close contacts they will never identify you, share your name, or your health information. They will talk to your close contacts about their own health, ask if they are having any symptoms and will offer guidance on how to self-quarantine, and will ask the contact about any services they may need to help them quarantine. This is how we contain this virus. If we are sick or if we may become sick because we know we were exposed, we self-isolate or self-quarantine for an amount of time until we know we can no longer spread the virus to someone else.

## **How do I know if the contact tracer is from the Louisiana Department of Health and not a fraud or scammer trying to ask me personal questions?**

The official Louisiana contact tracers will identify themselves as **being from the Louisiana Department of Health. The caller ID on the phone should show “LA Health Dept”**. They will never ask you about your finances or other personal information. They will never ask you to buy any gift cards. You will never be asked to give your banking information or social security number over the phone- if someone asks you this, hang up right away and do not give this information. To verify that you are the person that they are trying to reach, the LDH Contact Tracing Team may ask you to confirm your first name, last name, and date of birth. They do this to ensure they are not sharing any personal information with anyone that is not you.

## **My doctor has not contacted me about my test results but I got a call from someone wanting to know about my whereabouts. I am not comfortable.**

### **Do I have to talk to them before I receive my results?**

### **Do I have to talk to them at all?**

Sometimes the health department will get positive test results from a lab and call that person before their doctor gets a chance to call them with the results. The health department tries to call people as soon possible in order to share information about how to keep the illness from spreading to others. You can always ask the contact tracer to call you back after you've had a chance to call your doctor. **You will not be required to speak to the health department about your results. However, we strongly encourage you to speak with the Louisiana Department of Health, because this is an important way to help keep yourself and others safe and to prevent the spread of COVID-19.**

In any case, it is important to follow up with your doctor.

## Will the information I share with the contact tracer be kept confidential?

**Yes. The health department will contact** any person who tests positive and their close contacts. **The health department will not tell the contacts who tested positive or where they may have been when exposed, they will only share the date they were exposed.** All information is kept private under HIPAA laws. No information is shared with any other individual or government agency. Information that contacts provide is not shared with any marketers or other agencies.

## If I don't get contacted by a contact tracer, is that a sign that I have NOT come in contact with anyone who tested positive for Covid-19?

**Unfortunately, no.** You may have come in contact with someone who has tested positive, but they did not realize they were in close contact with you or they forgot to tell the contact tracing team. You may also have come in contact with someone who had a COVID-19 infection, but did not get tested. If you believe you may have been exposed in some way, take reasonable precautions to self-quarantine and call your primary care provider.

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For more information on Louisiana Department of Health contact tracing, visit [ldh.la.gov/ContactTracing](https://ldh.la.gov/ContactTracing).