

COVID-19

Contact Tracing in the Workplace: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions



Q: *What is COVID-19 contact tracing in the workplace?*

A: Contact tracing is a public health protection method used to identify and notify employees who are believed to have come into close contact with an employee who has a confirmed case of COVID-19. The identity of an infected employee is not revealed to co-workers.

Q: *What is close contact?*

A: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines close contact as “someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a *cumulative total* of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from two days before illness onset, or for asymptomatic patients, two days prior to test specimen collection, until the patient is isolated.” Cumulative means an employee may be considered exposed if they had brief, repeated close contact with an infected person throughout the workday. WorkCare clinicians apply this definition in our contact tracing program. The World Health Organization (WHO) published [interim guidance on contact tracing in the context of COVID-19](#) on May 10, 2020, which features an expanded interpretation.

Q: *Under what circumstances is a U.S. employer expected to perform contact tracing for COVID-19?*

A: Companies subject to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration’s (OSHA) General Duty Clause have an obligation to protect employees from harm. Contact tracing demonstrates compliance with this clause. Local public health authorities typically become involved in comprehensive contact tracing efforts when there is a risk of employees spreading disease to customers and others in the community.

Q: *How is contact tracing performed?*

A: There are two basic methods – digital tracking, often using a smartphone app, and telephonic contact with affected individuals. Telephonic contact tracers help the infected employee recall everyone with whom they had close contact when they may have been infectious. Contacts are provided with information about their personal exposure risk and the risk they pose to others, diagnostic options, how to self-quarantine, and what to do if they develop symptoms or test positive. Refer to this resource from the CDC to learn about [digital tools for contact tracing](#).

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Q: *What is the advantage of retaining WorkCare to perform contact tracing rather than rely on local public health authorities or a smartphone app?*

A: WorkCare’s contact tracing program allows employers to take prompt action to remove employees with exposure risk from the workplace so they can immediately begin a 14-day home quarantine period. Healthy employees who have not had close contact can remain on the job. In addition, employers obtain information they need to determine the need for interventions such as disinfection, changes in staffing allocations, or modifications in processes and procedures to ensure the workforce is adequately protected and operations are not disrupted.

Q: *What is the basic process WorkCare uses when conducting contact tracing in the workplace?*

A: The process begins once a confirmed case of COVID-19 is identified. WorkCare uses its Incident Intervention® contact center clinical team to manage the process with occupational physician oversight in the U.S. Each contact call takes an average of 20 to 30 minutes. The length of time it takes to reach all contacts depends on the infected employee’s cooperation and the number and availability of identified contacts. The entire process is documented and provided to the employer. This diagram illustrates steps WorkCare’s contact tracers follow when undertaking a trace:



Q: *How do we protect the identity of an employee who has COVID-19?*

A: Revealing protected health information to co-workers about an infected employee violates privacy provisions of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Employees may make an educated guess about who the infected person is, but even if they do it is illegal to divulge that information. Only authorized company personnel may know the identity of an infected employee. HIPAA does not apply to protected health information that is voluntarily provided by an employee to a supervisor. Reporting a positive test and/or symptoms, and staying home, are critical steps employees can take to help prevent the spread of disease.

Q: *What happens when a close contact is informed about potential exposure?*

A: Contacts are advised to begin a 14-day quarantine period at home and monitor themselves for symptoms including fever, chest tightness, cough and fatigue. Contacts may opt to take a diagnostic test to determine if they are infected. The optimal time to take the test after suspected exposure is five to seven days. If infection is confirmed, the contact tracing process may be repeated for that individual while they isolate themselves from others in their household. Refer to this webpage, where the CDC discusses [precautions and parameters for adult isolation](#).

Q: *What type of training is required to become a contact tracer?*

A: Workplace contact tracing is a specialized skill that requires discretion, sensitivity and compassion. WorkCare's contact tracers are clinicians and allied professionals who have completed training on telephonic contact methodology through the Johns Hopkins

Bloomberg School of Public Health. Course curriculum includes coronavirus epidemiology, ethics, building rapport to identify and counsel close contacts, and making recommendations for quarantine or isolation.

Q: *What is the return on investment (ROI) associated with telephonic contact tracing for employers who engage WorkCare to provide this service?*

A: How a company determines ROI depends on a number of factors. These may include how the company calculates costs associated with COVID-19-related work absences and production disruptions; liability exposure risk and legal defense; potential violation of OSHA regulations; and damage to brand and reputation in the event of an outbreak. The steps a company takes to prevent and manage COVID-19 in the workplace reflects the priority a company places on protecting the health of employees, customers and the general public. The fee structure for this service takes into consideration daily case rate averages and contact time estimates. While fundamental contact tracing principles will apply, this service may be customized to meet client needs.

Q: *What is WorkCare's background in this area?*

A: WorkCare has been providing employee health management services to employers for more than 35 years. In response to the pandemic, WorkCare introduced COVID-19 screening services in March 2020 and since then has successfully deployed a range of prevention and management solutions including automated and onsite daily symptom screening, exposure risk stratification and triage, testing and return-to-work clearances. Our team has extensive knowledge in applicable areas including the COVID-19 infection period, exposure risk assessment, quarantine and

isolation guidelines, diagnostic and antibody testing options, and determining when it is safe to return to work. Our professional team is trained to conduct employee interviews without violating confidentiality and while keeping employers informed on work status. Our team provides reassurance and evidence-based information to address health and safety concerns. In addition to their clinical skills, they understand the context of workplace culture, applicable regulations, and the importance of building rapport and trust.

Q: *Can our company combine contact tracing with other COVID-19 response solutions offered by WorkCare?*

A: Yes. To learn more, please contact us: 800-455-6155; info@workcare.com; www.workcare.com.