



# Department of Health

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## Contact Tracing and Case Investigation FAQs

January 14, 2022

**Note:** For questions related to schools, please visit [Frequently Asked Questions for Schools](#). For questions related to employers, please visit [Frequently Asked Questions for Employers](#).

### (1) What Has Changed about Contact Tracing?

New York State is following the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) case investigation and contact tracing guidance](#) during this winter surge in COVID-19 cases. CDC's guidance emphasizes case investigations focus on those who tested positive most recently and contact tracing focuses on household contacts and sensitive settings.

New York State has also given local health departments the ability to reduce contact tracing efforts to focus on case investigation and special settings. This means you may not get a call from a county or state public health worker if you test positive for or were exposed to COVID-19.

### (2) What is Contact Tracing and Case Investigation?

**Contact tracing** is the process of contacting all people who've had close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19, so that those close contacts can take action to protect themselves and those around them. These steps may involve isolation and quarantine.

**Case investigation** is a public health tool that involves asking someone who has tested positive for a communicable disease, like COVID-19, questions about their symptoms, the places they may have been, including work, school, and public gatherings, during the period just before and after they tested positive for the disease. Case investigations help public health workers understand the extent to which other people may be a risk of contracting the disease from the person who tested positive.

**(3) What is Isolation?** Isolation is for individuals who have been *infected* with COVID-19, even if they don't have symptoms. You isolate to prevent spreading the virus to others.

**(4) What is Quarantine?** Quarantine is for someone who has been exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 through [close contact](#) with someone who is infected, but has not tested positive for COVID-19 and does not have symptoms. Quarantine is important because even before a person has tested positive for COVID-19 or has symptoms, they could spread the virus that causes COVID-19 to other people without knowing.

### (5) What does "close contact" mean?

**Close contacts** are the people you have been around during the two-day period before the start of your

symptoms, or if you don't have symptoms, two days before your positive COVID-19 specimen collection date. **You should notify these people of your positive COVID-19 test as they are at greatest risk of infection.**

Close contacts are someone who was less than [6 feet away from an infected person](#) (laboratory-confirmed or a [clinical diagnosis](#)) for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, *three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes*) is considered a close contact.

**Exception:** In the **K–12 indoor classroom** setting or a structured outdoor setting where mask use can be observed (i.e., holding class outdoors with educator supervision), the close contact definition excludes students who were between 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a [clinical diagnosis](#)) if both the infected student and the exposed student(s) [correctly and consistently](#) wore well-fitting [masks](#) the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting. For more information, please visit [Frequently Asked Questions for Schools](#).

**(6) Will I receive a call from a public health worker if I test positive for COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19?**

New Yorkers may not receive a call from a public health worker if they test positive for COVID-19 or were exposed to COVID-19, but there are important steps you should take to protect yourself and those around you. Review the information [here](#) to find out what you should do if you test positive for COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19.

**(7) Why won't I get a call from the state or local health department if I test positive for COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19?**

At this stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, calling people who have tested positive for COVID-19 or who have been exposed to COVID-19 is no longer the most effective strategy to reduce community transmission because the virus is so widespread in the community. Information about what to do if you test positive for COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19 is [readily available](#). If you receive a call from a public health worker to learn more about your particular exposures and close contacts, your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

**(8) If I test positive for COVID-19 with a test I perform at home, am I required to report the results to the health department? Most local health departments are not accepting self-reports of at-home, over-the-counter test results. Some local health departments are. Visit your local health department's website to learn more about whether your health department expects you to report your COVID-19 test results.**

If you collect a specimen at home and send your specimen to a laboratory for analysis, the laboratory will report the result. Whether or not you report your positive at-home test result, there are important steps you should take to protect yourself and those around you. Review the information [here](#).