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Department of Health Dec. 20-26 Update On COVID-19 Investigations, Contact Tracing, Monitoring Efforts: Pennsylvanians Urged To “Answer the Call” And Download the COVID App

Harrisburg, PA - The Department of Health today shared its weekly update on Pennsylvania’s COVID-19 case investigation and contact tracing data and encouraged Pennsylvanians to download the [COVID Alert PA app](#), as more than 731,000 have already done to aid in contact tracing efforts. All 67 counties have substantial COVID-19 transmission rates.

“We have learned many things throughout this past year and now we all know our role in the fight against COVID-19. We know that we must answer the call when a public health professional calls, we know to wear a mask, social distance and wash our hands frequently,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “As we go into the new year, we need to continue using the tools we have built throughout 2020 like the COVID Alert PA app and the Connect & Protect Form, so we can help stop the spread of COVID-19 right in its tracks.”

The [contact tracing process](#) is not possible without a case investigation by a public health professional. Across the commonwealth, there are 258 case investigators who reach out to incoming cases who are younger than 19 and older than 64 to find out where they went and with whom they came into contact in order to prevent outbreaks while infectious. This case investigation typically takes between 30 and 60 minutes to complete. For those who are between 19 and 64 years old and reside in an area without their own county of municipal health department, they will be contacted by a contact tracer to complete a [Connect & Protect Form](#) to initiate a digital case investigation.

For this reporting week between Sunday, December 20 and Saturday, December 26, there were 53,947 COVID-19 cases statewide. Of those cases reported within that week, 11 percent, or 5,934 cases, had a case investigation started within 24 hours of receiving the positive report. Public health professionals will continue calling to complete the case investigation after the 24-hour period. An additional three percent, or 1,618 cases, had a case investigation started within 48 hours.

Although public health professionals may call to start the case investigation, they are not all successful. The Department of Health leaves voicemails, texts, and sends a letter to the home requesting a return call. There were 8,303 people, or 13 percent of cases, in this reported week that were successfully contacted by a public health professional statewide.

In addition to the traditional case investigations, contact tracers will call to reach the case and share a Connect & Protect Form to initiate a digital case investigation. Contact tracers made 1,227 calls to reach 45 percent, or 559 individuals, successfully. Of the 443 that were sent forms, 40 percent, or 173 forms were completed and collected between the launch of the form on December 21.

Therefore, there were 7,725 individuals, or 14 percent cases, who successfully completed a case investigation this week.

After the initial case investigation is complete, contact tracing begins. Within the same time period of December 20 to December 26, there were 1,682 contact tracing staff working with local and county health entities, partner organizations and the Regional Response Health Collaboration Program within the Department of Human Services as well as volunteers from Co-County Wellness in Berks County and Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health. These staff monitored 5,862 contacts who were identified during the case investigations.

Currently, all of the allotted 1,090 people have been hired through Insight Global. Some of these staff have been promoted to perform case investigations to meet the immediate needs of increased caseloads. There are 50 case investigators, 40 supervisors, and 10 resource coordinators who also help to refer Pennsylvanians to services during quarantine across the commonwealth.

Since the implementation of the Contact Tracing Management System in early October through December 26 in those areas of the state where Pennsylvania Department of Health is responsible for contact tracing, there have been:

- 71,800 contacts have been processed for areas where PA DOH has jurisdiction;
- 54,900 people, or 76 percent of the total contacts identified, have been effectively reached to communicate their quarantine status and offer ongoing symptom monitoring;
- 13,900 people, or about 19 percent of the total contacts, were not reached; and
- 200 were still in the process of being contacted.

On September 22, the department launched [COVID Alert PA](#), a free mobile app that uses Bluetooth technology to let a person know that they have been exposed to COVID-19 without compromising the identity or location of either the person using the app, or of the person to whom they may have been exposed.

The Department of Health has made updates the COVID Alert PA app to include 13- through 17-year-old residents with parental consent to download the app and four new languages. This app is interoperable with [16 other states](#) that also utilize the same notification exposure app technology.

In addition to the traditional case investigations and contact tracing process, there have been 650 cases that confirmed their positivity and uploaded their random IDs through the app. These uploads generated 324 exposure alerts to persons who have downloaded the app on their phones and who were in close contact (six feet for 15 minutes or more) to the case. Of those who received the alerts, 49 individuals requested a call back for further assistance from a trained contact tracer.

As the contact tracing program expands, the Department of Health continues to work in partnership with over 150 organizations, in addition to the county and municipal health departments, through regional partnerships to help gather and answer questions, identify problems and find solutions to improve contact tracing efforts within the region. Each regional partnership has met at least once, and includes public health staff, health providers, academic institutions, community organizations, and other stakeholders interested in helping to coordinate and engage around contact tracing efforts.

Organizations and entities interested in partnering in these efforts should reach out to RA-DHCONTACTTRACING@pa.gov.

You can find more information on the state's contact tracing efforts at the Department of Health's website [here](#).

The Wolf Administration stresses the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.
- Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.
- If you must go out, you are required to wear a mask when in a business or where it is difficult to maintain proper social distancing.
- Download the COVID Alert PA app and make your phone part of the fight. The free app can be found in the [Google Play Store](#) and the [Apple App Store](#) by searching for "covid alert pa".

Updated Coronavirus Links: Press Releases, State Lab Photos, Graphics

- [Daily COVID-19 Report](#)
- [Press releases regarding coronavirus](#)
- [Latest information on the coronavirus](#)
- [Photos of the state's lab in Exton](#) (for download and use)
- [Coronavirus and preparedness graphics](#) (located at the bottom of the page)

[Community preparedness and procedures materials](#)