Department of Health Jan. 24-30 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 778,000 have already done to aid in contact tracing efforts. There are 59 counties in the substantial level of COVID-19 transmission rate.

"When you are diagnosed with COVID-19, we have public health professionals standing by to contact as many Pennsylvanians as possible to help inform close contacts and mitigate spread. In order for these proven health practices to be effective, we need residents to play their part and answer the call and participate in the case investigation," Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam said. "If residents participate in these proven public health practices as well as downloading the COVID Alert PA app, we can truly help mitigate the spread of this virus and keep our friends, family and loved ones safe."

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 or municipal health department, they will be contacted by a contact tracer to complete a Connect & Protect Form to initiate a digital case investigation in effort to connect to more people.

For this reporting week between Sunday, January 24 and Saturday, January 30, there were 39,179 COVID-19 cases statewide. Of those cases reported within that week, 20 percent, or 7,836 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 six percent, or 2,351 cases, had a case investigation started within 48 hours.

Although public health professionals may call to start the case investigation, the case may not answer the call on the first attempt. The Department of Health leaves voicemails, texts, and sends a letter to the home requesting a return call. There were 7,934 people, or 20 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. There are now a total of 325 contact tracers working to assist this process specifically. For this reporting week between January 24 and January 30, Contact tracers made 12,937 calls to reach 64 percent, or 8,227 individuals, successfully. Of the 7,030 that were sent forms, 43 percent, or 3,018 were returned. Since the implementation of the form on December 21, 2020 until January 30, we have received over 7,167 completed forms.

Therefore, there were 10,952 individuals, or roughly 28 percent of 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 January 24 to January 30, there were 1,509 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 5,761 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 January 23 in those areas of the state where Pennsylvania Department of Health is responsible for contact tracing, 73,575 of 98,075 contacts, or 75 percent of the total contacts identified, were effectively reached to communicate their quarantine status and offer ongoing symptom monitoring.

Between January 24 and January 30 there have been:

- 7,918 contacts have been processed for areas where PA DOH has jurisdiction;
- 5,904 people, or 75 percent of the total contacts identified, have been effectively reached to communicate their quarantine status and offer ongoing symptom monitoring;
- 1,191 people, or about 23 percent of the total contacts, were not reached; and
- 491 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 allow 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 1,347 cases that confirmed their positivity and uploaded their random IDs through the app. These uploads generated 649 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, 92 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](#)