



Contact Tracing for COVID-19

In any infectious disease outbreak, it is critical to trace contacts to ensure that individuals who may have been exposed to the disease are evaluated and treated if necessary. The Hays County Local Health Department has protocols in place for different exposure situations.

If a member of the public contacts the Local Health Department and believes they have COVID-19 but are self-isolating and do not want to be tested, a representative will ask them about close contacts they had beginning 14 days prior to symptom onset. If they do not know of an exposure that occurred with a laboratory-confirmed case, then they are asked to notify their friends and family they have been in contact with and inform them to monitor for COVID-19 symptoms. This self-monitoring should be sustained for 14 days starting at the last contact date with the suspected COVID-19 individual.

If a member of the public tests positive, a representative will contact the patient and start the contact tracing in the same way (14 days prior to symptom onset.) Most people have self-quarantined for 2 weeks by now, so they have only been around household family and conducted some errands out in public. That makes it difficult to determine where they contracted COVID-19. However, if the individual provides names and phone numbers of persons that they have been around within the 14-day period, those persons are contacted. These contacts are interviewed for COVID-19 symptoms and informed that they may have been exposed to the virus. They are also asked if they have had any close contact with lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases that they are aware of.

If the person has only been around household family and been to a couple of public places for groceries and errands, the contact tracing ends there. It is well known that we have community spreading of COVID-19, so issuing an alert every time someone mentions a specific public place would not be useful. For instance, grocery stores comprise about 95 percent of the public places COVID-19 patients say they've been to.

Hays County currently has relatively few COVID-19 cases. If community members continue to follow social distancing guidelines and practice health protective behaviors, they will drastically lower their odds of contracting COVID-19 while in a public space. Behaviors known to deter COVID-19 are handwashing for 20 seconds at a time, never touching one's face, and maintaining 6 feet of separation from others while in public.

If a COVID-19-positive patient is a healthcare provider or first responder, the contact tracing is much more in depth. Every individual that person has come into contact with over the last 14 days will be contacted. The vulnerable populations these professionals interact with require the utmost protection.