



MEDIA RELEASE

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WHAT ERIE COUNTY RESIDENTS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CONTACT TRACING, ISOLATION AND QUARANTINE FOR COVID-19

ERIE COUNTY, NY – As Western New York moves through the phases of reopening with NY Forward, the Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH) contact tracing program will continue to be an important part of reducing community transmission of COVID-19 in Erie County.

When people are tested for COVID-19, the result is sent to a statewide lab reports database. Each day, ECDOH epidemiology staff reviews those reports. The ECDOH contact tracing team contacts individuals with a positive COVID-19 diagnostic test and begins case investigations.

“Contact tracing is a standard tool in public health to identify and isolate individuals with a communicable disease,” said **Commissioner of Health Dr. Gale Burstein**. “With COVID-19, we are working with these individuals to identify their close contacts, advise those contacts of the need to quarantine and offer them diagnostic testing.”

What happens when you have a positive COVID-19 test?

If you are an Erie County resident diagnosed with COVID-19, a contact tracer from ECDOH will call you to confirm the diagnosis, discuss with whom you have been in contact, and ask you to isolate at home. The contact tracer will explain what isolation involves, and ask questions about the household and your ability to isolate from other people.

Isolation

Isolation means staying at home in a specific room, away from other people, and using a separate bathroom if possible. Individuals who need help to isolate, whether it is support for groceries, medications and other basic needs, can get that support from ECDOH.

Isolation is similar to quarantine, except that isolation is for individuals who have a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis and quarantine is for individuals who are potentially exposed to someone with this disease during a period when they are infectious.

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What is a close contact?

A “close contact” is someone who was within six feet of a person with COVID-19 for at least 10 minutes, starting from 48 hours before they started to feel symptoms, and for asymptomatic cases, from two days prior to specimen collection.

If you have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19, an employee from ECDOH might call to inform you that you have potentially been exposed. They will ask you to stay at home and quarantine.

Quarantine

Quarantine means staying home, monitoring for symptoms, and maintaining social distancing (at least 6 feet from others at all times). That means remaining in a specific room separate from other non-exposed people and pets in the home, and using a separate bathroom, if possible.

Individuals under quarantine who are deemed “essential” for their workplace may continue to work, with restrictions. Those restrictions include:

- Employee must remain free of COVID-19 symptoms (asymptomatic).
- It would not be feasible for employee to work from home or if not working would adversely affect the facility operations.
- Employee undergoes temperature and symptom monitoring twice a day, including immediately before arrival to work and when at home.
- Employee wears a face covering while working until 14 days after last exposure.

These “essential” workers are required to maintain quarantine when they are not at work for a full 14 days after their last known exposure. If COVID-19 symptoms develop, they must stop work immediately and isolate at home. Regardless of symptoms, all contacts should consider getting a COVID-19 diagnostic test five days or more after their last known exposure.

Individuals under quarantine who are not considered essential by their place of employment or who are currently not working or working at home must remain at home for 14 days after their last known exposure. They will be asked to monitor for COVID-19 symptoms, and consider getting a COVID-19 diagnostic test five days or more after their last known exposure.

Nursing home employees have different requirements for quarantine and returning to work, determined by the New York State Department of Health.

What should businesses do?

If one of your employees has a positive test result, an ECDOH contact tracer will interview that employee as part of the disease investigation. A contact tracer may contact the business owner, supervisor, or human resources department to identify potential close contacts among other employees and customers, clients or visitors to the workplace.

“With more and more industries opening up in Erie County, we expect that our contact tracing investigations will involve more individual businesses, their employees and customers,” **said Dr. Burstein.** “We are going to rely on the cooperation of these businesses to help our contact tracers complete their vital work, and to reduce COVID-19 community transmission.”

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Confidentiality

Medical information that is shared with ECDOH contact tracers is kept confidential. A contact tracer may share information about an employee diagnosed with COVID-19 with a business owner, supervisor, or human resources department in order to identify and contact potential close contacts. Since a COVID-19 diagnosis is protected health information, businesses are advised to maintain confidentiality and avoid disclosing the identity of the employee diagnosed with COVID-19 to other staff. The locations of businesses with a confirmed COVID-19 will not be announced by ECDOH unless there is a concern about an exposure to the public, and we are not able to identify close contacts through our investigation.

Financial Assistance for Individuals under Quarantine or Isolation

There are paid leave options through state and federal sources for individuals who have their employment interrupted by a period of isolation or quarantine. These options vary based on the size and income of an employer.

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For more information:

- **Erie County Department of Health, COVID-19 Information Line:** (716) 858-2929 – foreign language interpretation available
- **Erie County Department of Health, COVID-19:** <http://www.erie.gov/covid19>
- **Erie County Department of Health, Online Case Mapping:** www.erie.gov/covidmap
- **Erie County Department of Health, Searchable Map for Test Locations:** www.erie.gov/covidtestsites

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