

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**July 22, 2020**

## **Department of Health Builds Contact Tracing Resources to Support Increases of COVID-19 Cases**

**Harrisburg, PA** - The Pennsylvania Department of Health today provided an update on contact tracing efforts as COVID-19 remains a threat in our communities. Contact tracing is the process of identifying, notifying, and monitoring anyone who came in close contact with an individual who tested positive for COVID-19 while they were infectious.

“Across Pennsylvania, we have dedicated public health professionals who truly are the backbone of contact tracing, working alongside our regional partnerships, staff and volunteers,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine. “As COVID-19 cases increase, we continue our efforts to support, strengthen and expand in order to conquer any potential surge in COVID-19 cases. Without case investigations the proven public health strategies, like contact tracing efforts and monitoring would not be possible. Contact tracing is critical to identify any instances of community spread and prevent larger outbreaks to keep Pennsylvania safe from COVID-19.”

The Department of Health continues to expand and build the infrastructure for long-term public health needs, especially those in the near future to tackle any COVID-19 surges in cases. This expansion includes volunteers, regional partnerships and hiring contact tracing staff.

Currently, Pennsylvanians share on average one to ten contacts. Our estimates show that the state needs about 625 contact tracers. However, this number could grow hundreds, even thousands, depending on the resurgence of COVID-19 in the fall.

Currently, the commonwealth has a total of 661 contact tracers. As of the [July 2020 report](#) released July 13, there were 649 contact tracers with the following breakdown in each regional health district in Pennsylvania:

- Northcentral District: 37 contact tracers
- South Central District: 73 contact tracers
- Northeast District: 69 contact tracers
- Southeast District: 380 contact tracers
- Northwest District: 29 contact tracers
- Southwest District: 61 contact tracers

Within each of these health districts, we are working to gather a number of outside organizations to discuss the contact tracing needs and any potential problems and solutions in the various regions across the state. These regional partnerships consist of community

business organizations, employers, federally qualified health centers, county human services organizations, foundations and health systems, and colleges and universities.

The Department of Health is [hiring](#) contact tracing field managers and community health nurses to strengthen contact tracing needs throughout the state. Contact tracing field managers would allow each coordinator to foster relationships with their regional partners and manage contact tracers within their respective region. Community health nurses will assist with COVID-19 case investigations.

Between June 29 and July 13, contact tracers have enrolled 3,638 contacts in the Sara Alert system. The Sara Alert, working alongside our disease surveillance system (NEDSS), offers contact tracers the ability to track, monitor, isolate and test symptomatic contacts and is further enhanced by the use of technology applications. This web-based monitoring tool enable contact tracers to send daily emails, texts and/or phone calls to cases and identified close contacts throughout their isolation/quarantine monitoring period. This technology enhances the contact tracer's ability to promptly respond and provide guidance to symptomatic individuals.

For more information on contact tracing, please visit our [website here](#).

Mask-wearing is required in all businesses and whenever leaving home. Consistent mask-wearing is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19. Remember: My mask protects you; your mask protects me.

### **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.

### **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](#)
- [Map with the number of COVID-19 cases](#)

All Pennsylvania residents are encouraged to sign up for AlertPA, a text notification system for health, weather, and other important alerts like COVID-19 updates from commonwealth agencies. Residents can sign up online at [www.ready.pa.gov/BelInformed/Signup-For-Alerts](http://www.ready.pa.gov/BelInformed/Signup-For-Alerts).