

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 9, 2021

Department of Health Feb. 21-27 Update On COVID-19 Investigations, Contact Tracing, Monitoring Efforts: Pennsylvanians Urged To ‘Answer the Call,’ Complete the Connect & Protect Form, and Download the COVID App

Harrisburg, PA - The Department of Health (DOH) 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 835,000 have already done, to aid in contact tracing efforts. There are 29 counties, currently, in the substantial level of COVID-19 transmission rate.

“Now over 835,000 Pennsylvanians have downloaded COVID Alert PA adding another tool to their toolbox to unite against COVID-19,” Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam said. “While we continue to add supports and resources for residents on the app, like recently adding vaccine information, the app’s primary service is to provide an exposure alert, if you are in close contact with someone who tests positive. We continue to advocate for our fellow Pennsylvanians to add this app to their phones today – along with continuing our proven health practices like wearing a mask, washing hands, social distancing and answering the case when public health professionals call.”

The [contact tracing process](#) is not possible without a case investigation by a public health professional. Across the commonwealth, there are 200 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 an effort to connect to more people.

For this reporting week between Sunday, February 21 - Saturday, February 27, there were 17,801 COVID-19 cases statewide. Of those cases reported within that week, 31 percent, or 5,518 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 10 percent, or 1,780 cases, had a case investigation started within 48 hours.

Although public health professionals may call to start the case investigation, the individual 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 2,305 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 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 February 21 to February 27, contact tracers made 4,720 calls to reach 65 percent, or 3,083 individuals, successfully. Of the 3,083 that were sent forms, 29 percent, or 771 were returned. Since the implementation of the form on December 21, 2020 until February 27, we have received over 12,308 completed forms.

Therefore, there were 3,076 individuals, or more than 17 percent of cases, for whom a case investigation has been successfully completed this week.

After the initial case investigation is complete, contact tracing begins. Within the same time period of February 21-27, there were 1,538 contact tracing staff working with local and county health entities, partner organizations as well as volunteers from Co-County Wellness in Berks County and Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health. These staff monitored 6,157 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 in order to meet the immediate needs of increased caseloads. There are 50 case investigators, 40 supervisors, and 10 resource coordinators who assist in referring Pennsylvanians to services during quarantine throughout the commonwealth.

Since the implementation of the Contact Tracing Management System in early October through February 27 in those areas of the state where Pennsylvania Department of Health is responsible for contact tracing, 87,794 of 115,617 contacts, or 76 percent of the total contacts identified, were effectively reached to communicate their quarantine status and offer ongoing symptom monitoring.

Between February 21st and February 27th there have been:

- 3,410 contacts have been processed for areas where PA DOH has jurisdiction;
- 2,305 people, or 68 percent of the total contacts identified, have been effectively reached to communicate their quarantine status and offer ongoing symptom monitoring;
- 676 people, or about 29 percent of the total contacts, were not reached; and
- 429 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 [22 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 1,769 cases that confirmed their positivity and uploaded their random IDs through the app. These uploads generated 816 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, 114 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](#)

While vaccine supply from the federal government remains limited, the Department of Health is working to ensure the vaccine is provided in a way that is ethical, equitable and efficient.

- The [Your Turn](#) tool provides a way to register to be alerted when it's your turn to be vaccinated.
- A [commonwealth COVID-19 vaccination guide](#) explains the current process for getting one. Pennsylvanians with questions about the vaccination process can call the Department of Health hotline at 1-877-724-3258.
- [Vaccine provider map](#) to find a COVID-19 vaccine provider near you.
- All of the locations that received vaccine and how much they have received can be found on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution webpage](#).
- [Vaccine dashboard data](#) can also be found on the website to find more information on the doses administered and showcase demographic information.
- Pennsylvanians can provide feedback on the [Pennsylvania COVID-19 Interim Vaccination Plan](#) by clicking on the Plan Feedback Form square under Popular Vaccine Topics [here](#).
- Frequently asked questions can be found [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](#)